

**MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN HUNGARY
AND ROMANIA: 1989-1999**

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
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for the award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



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CERTIFICATE

I declare that the dissertation entitled, "**MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN HUNGARY AND ROMANIA: 1989-1999**" submitted by me in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**, is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

(Anurag Ranjan)

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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PREFACE

The wave of democratization which swept the post Soviet space, led to the establishment of democratic regimes in both Hungary and Romania. Among many yardsticks to measure a political system's democratic credentials, media independence is an important one.

This proposed study intends to examine the intricate issues related to media in Hungary and Romania. It focuses on the relationship between media and democracy in both the countries and attempts to identify and study the distinct features of change in the situation of media in both countries. The study also analyses the role which media played during democratic revolutions of 1989, and the role media has been playing in consolidating the democratization process. This study covers the period from 1989 to 1999.

In trying to comprehend the interface between the structures of the state and media in post-communist period it is necessary to understand the nature of communist systems that were in place specifically in these two countries and the whole of Eastern Europe till the late 80s. This would equip us to understand the extent to which media functioning in the decade under study has been affected by the socialist legacy and the new market forces at work.

During communist period, media was under the supervision of respective communist parties in both Hungary and Romania. The media was meant to further the cause of socialism. The primacy was given to economic freedom rather than media freedom. Although, theoretically media was given independence but any idea related to liberal democracy (read bourgeoisie democracy) and free market economy was not tolerated, as it could undermine the people's democracy. The media policy of communist regimes can be summarized in the Lenin's guidelines to media, according to which, "The role of a newspaper... is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a

collective propagator and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer. In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labour. With the aid of the newspaper, and through it, a permanent organization will naturally take shape". In short, media was to propagate the achievements of the socialist nation in the fields of production, construction and the cultural revolution.

The first chapter of the study gives a broad outline of the relation between media and democracy. It discusses various theoretical perspectives on media freedom. This enables us to assess the possibility and extent of media freedom that the countries under study strive to achieve.

The following two chapters are country specific, giving a detailed account and analysis of media related developments. The fourth chapter compares the media developments of the two countries to bring out the similarities and differences between them. Some references to other East European countries are also brought in to understand media developments better. The conclusion briefly summarizes the findings of the study with some suggestions that could strengthen media functioning and in turn strengthen democracy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

“Raw political power... will be the decisive factor in determining how much freedom the media have”.¹

- Dennis and Vanden Heuvel

This chapter deals with the relationship between media and democracy and how both influence each other. It studies how media functions in a liberal democratic environment and tries to explore the possibility and extent of media independence in a liberal democracy. This leads to a discussion of the constraints which usually come in the way of independent working of media. It also deals with various theories of media especially the Marxist critic of media in a liberal democratic set up. The chapter further attempts both to reevaluate traditional concepts of the democratic media, and outline the form which an ideal democratic media system should take. This chapter will also give a brief outline of situation of media in Hungary and Romania, the countries under study.

The mass media has been recognized as politically significant since the advent of mass literacy and the popular press in the late nineteenth century. It is widely argued that, through a combination of social and technological changes, media has become increasingly a powerful actor. In the age of representative democracy, media is the principal mechanism through which information about issues and policies and political choices are presented to the public. Modern politics is largely mediated

¹ Everrette Dennis & Jon Vanden Heuvel, *Emerging Voices: East European Media in Transition* (New York: Gannet Foundation Media center, 1990),p.7.

politics, experienced by most citizens through broadcast and print media of choice.² Any study of democracy in contemporary conditions cannot but include how the media reports and interprets political events and issues, influences political processes and shapes public opinion. Thus, media has become central to politics and public life in contemporary democracy. Democracy implies participatory governance, and it is the media that informs people about various problems of society, which makes those wielding power on their behalf answerable to them. In a democracy actions of the government and the state, and the efforts of competing parties and interest to exercise political power should be underpinned and legitimized by critical scrutiny and informed debate facilitated by the media institutions.

The development of mass television audience from the 1950s onwards, and more recently the proliferation of channels and media output associated with the 'new' media, has massively increased the mass media's penetration in everyday lives of people.³ According to Jay Blumler, television is the preferred source of news for most people. He sees less editorializing on television than in newspapers and finds the popular press in Britain less informative than television in its coverage of political news. Moreover, television is more "linear" than newspapers, whose spatial layout allows readers in selecting which item they attend to. Consequently television news is seen as more credible by its audience on political issues compared to newspapers,

² Mukul Sharma, "Media and Governance", *Seminar*, 51(4), Jan.2002,pp.41-42.

³ M. Scammel, "New Media, New Politics", in Dunleavy, A. Gamble, I. Holiday and G. Peele (eds.), *Development in British Politics*, (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp.101-2.

which reinforce people's views they already have formulated. Newspapers and television thus serve different and complementary functions for news audience.⁴

Thus, the public now relies on the mass media more heavily than ever before. Now, it is widely accepted that there is a strong connection between mass communication and democracy. For democracies to function, civil society requires access to information as a means to make informed political choices. Similarly politicians require the media as a way in which they can take stock of the public mood, present their views, and interact with society. As the fourth estate or watchdog of government, the media is expected to critically assess state action and provide information to the public. Ideally, then the media not only provides a link between rulers and the ruled but also imparts information that can check the centralization of power. Thus, mass media constitutes the backbone of democracy.

However, there is a growing concern that the mass media is not fulfilling these functions properly. They try to maintain status quo, as they support ruling elites who are sympathetic to their commercial considerations.⁵ Media critics claim that commercial mass media controlled by a few multinational conglomerates have become an antidemocratic force as they monopolize the media market. In East Europe, for instance media MNCs such as *Axel Springer*, *Bertelsmann*, *Star* etc have around 80% share in the Hungarian media. In Poland, the American company *Date Chase Enterprises* controls the Polish Cable Television network with an investment of

⁴ J. Blumner, "The Press, Television and Democracy", in Morris Janowitz and Paul Hirsch (eds), *Reader in Public opinion and Mass Communication*, (Canada: The Free Press, 1981), pp.117-18.

⁵ D. Kellner, "The Media and Social Problems", in Richard G. (ed.), *A Handbook of Social Problems: A Comparative International Perspective*, (London: Sage, 2004), p.65..

100 million dollars.⁶ Public media faces many problems in resisting the competition from private media. This is true because private channels emphasize entertainment programmes (like games, quiz shows and serial stories) that correspond to public demands, which are created by advertisements and eulogizing consumerist culture.

These days news has become more entertaining than informing, supplying mostly gossip, scandal, sex and violence. Political news has become more about personalities than about their ideologies. It is evident from the recently held presidential elections in USA, where the main focus of election were John Kerry and George Bush Jr. It appeared to be a personality clash between these two. In the absence of serious debate, voters are left with paid propaganda containing only meaningless and cheap slogans making them disinterested and cynical about politics.⁷ It is also true that the watchdogs are highlighting non-serious issues. The media hunts for scandals in the private lives of politicians and their families, but ignore much more serious consequences of their politics. They go after wounded politicians like sharks in a feeding frenzy.⁸ For instance, in the case of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky affair it can be seen that, the issue was blown out of proportion and the real issues concerning American politics were put under the carpet. In the same way, when Prime Minister Tony Blair became a father for the fourth time, media was filled with stories about his new baby. One newspaper devoted seven pages to the story; the birth of Leo Blair led the television news broadcasts; later in the week pictures of the Prime

⁶ Marcin Frybes, "The Transformation of the media in post communist central Europe", in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and Southeastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure Since 1989*, (USA: Praeger Pub, 2000), pp.56-57.

⁷ W.L. Bennett and R.M. Entman *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.65-69.

⁸ D.L. Altheide, Michalowski, "Fear in the News: A Discourse of Control", *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol.49, Dec.2000, pp.475-503.

Minister and his son were sold for 500 pounds, the proceeds going to a children's charity. And, most extraordinarily, the birth improved Blair's standing in the polls, his popularity rose by several points with Leo's arrival. Politics was truly 'personalized', and politicians became part of a nation's soap opera.⁹

Very often, the media makes us afraid of wrong things. Minor dangers are hysterically blown out of proportions, while much more serious dangers in our society go unnoticed. Apart from this there is a noticeable distinct trend in the media. The media fails to report wrongdoings in the industry. For instance, many media suppress information about the health hazards of smoking due to pressures from advertisers, and instead they publish the news about charity works and NGO activities which are funded by these liquor-tobacco barons.¹⁰ For instance, Vijay Mallaya, who is a doyen of liquor industry in India, was recently in news for bringing back the sword of Tipu Sultan from Britain in an auction held in London. This is because most of the newspapers, radio and Television channels get their income from advertisements and sponsorships. Media therefore seeks to optimally satisfy the interests of their advertisers, which do not necessarily coincide with the interest of their readers, listeners and viewers. The interests of the media consumers are satisfied only in so far as these coincide with the interests of the advertisers. This is the reason why many countries have public radio and Television stations with public service obligations. For instance, despite having heavily privatized media industry, Hungary has *Magyar Television (MTV)* and *Duna TV*, two public service television channels. It also has a

⁹ John Street, *Mass Media Politics and Democracy*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001),p.273.

¹⁰ R. Cirino, "Bias Through Selection and Omission", in Cohen, J. Young (eds), *The Manufacture of News*, (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1973), pp.243-60.

public radio, called *Hungarian Radio*.¹¹ Liberalizing the media market and relying on the free market forces are policies that are often used for the express purpose of making sure that all interests are served.

Media is also used for "agenda setting" during elections. According to McCombs and Shaw, mass media sets the "agenda" for elections' campaign by its emphasis on and style of reporting different issues. In comparing the content of campaign reporting with the opinions of prospective voters, they find significant correspondence between the points most salient to individual citizens and those highlighted in news reports. They suggest that news media has considerable power to determine which topics will be most important in political campaigns even if it doesn't substantially alter voters' choices, concerning outcomes.¹² These days candidates approach the people through the mass media rather than in person. Most of the people know, what comes to them "second" or "third" hand from the mass media or from other people. Lang and Lang observe: The mass media forces attention to certain issues. It builds up public images of political figures. It is constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals should think about, know about, and have feelings about.¹³ This agenda setting function of the mass media is succinctly stated by Cohen, who noted that the press, "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about".¹⁴ Sometimes, media is used for highlighting the agenda which is favorable for any

¹¹ European Federation of Journalists, http://www.ifi_Europe.org/docs/FOREIGN%20OWNERSHIP%20IN%20CEE%20MEDIA%20COUNTRIES, June 2003.doc.

¹² Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda setting Function of Mass Media", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol.36, summer,1972, , pp.176-87.

¹³ Ibid, p. 177.

¹⁴ Ibid

particular political party. For example, during last parliamentary elections in India, "Feel Good Factor", was highlighted extensively to favour BJP's winning chances. When media starts setting the agendas of elections which are not people centric then media is considered to be assuming an undemocratic role.

Advertisements play a big role in the economy of media. According to Boulding (1955), most advertising in the media is devoted to an attempt to build up in the mind of the consumer irrational preferences for certain brand or goods. All the arts of psychology are used to persuade consumers that they should buy Bingo rather than Bango.¹⁵ Advertising industry works for creating brand consciousness among people to make profit for the industrial houses. In this way, they create unnecessary desires among people to get their products sold. Big industries which advertise their products in media are influential to the extent that they even influence the content of the media. The big industries don't tend to get their products advertised in the newspapers or channels which are hostile to privatization etc. They tend to get their brands advertised in the media which is considered to be pro-globalization and favour free market economy.

In the age of globalization, the media is owned by multinational companies broadcasting across borders. These media MNCs have formed closer ties with the politicians who are favorable to their business interests. For instance, these media MNCs tend to favour the parties or candidates who have inclinations towards free market economy. This is highlighted by Chadwick's pioneering research which shows that a number of media entrepreneurs formed a tactical alliance with the labour

¹⁵ Andrew, and S.C. Ehrenberg, "Repetitive Advertising and the Consumer", in Morris Janowitz and Paul Hirsh (eds), *Reader in public opinion and mass communication*, (Canada: The Free Press, 1981),p.411.

government in Australia in the late 80s as a way of securing official permission to consolidate their control over Australia's television and press. This resulted in an unprecedented number of editorial endorsements for the labour party in the 1987 election. In the same way, a tacit understanding was reached between Tony Blair and Rupert Murdoch (Media Tycoon) in the 1990s. Tabloid hounds pursuing Labour were called to heel in return for very strong signals that a new Labour government would not attack Murdoch's monopolistic empire.¹⁶ It is illustrated beautifully by Noam Chomsky, who says that media serves the interest of state and corporate power, which are closely interlinked, framing their reporting and analysis in a manner supportive of established privilege and limiting debate and discussion accordingly.¹⁷

Indispensability of Media

Such debates and criticisms notwithstanding there is a general agreement on the indispensability of mass communication in some form. Democracy depends uniquely on mass communication. Rulers may use coercion but by and large they rely mainly on persuasion for cultivating the public support. Citizens, who know that their rulers are fallible, must depend on the mass media for independent comments about affairs of the state. Thus, mass media has become indispensable to democracy.

The media is vital for the creation and vitality of civil society, without it, freedom of communication, and thus the foundation of democratic rule is undermined. The emergence of democratic representative governments correspond to the needs of numerically enlarged and physically dispersed community. Representative democracy

¹⁶ James Curran, *Media and Power*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.216-17.

¹⁷ Third World Traveller: Media Control, http://www.thirdworldtraveller.com/Media_control-propaganda/media_control.html

is inconceivable without forms of mass communication to create awareness on public issues that face a society whose members are not personally in touch with each other and whose central institutions are remote from the people, they serve or exploit. Media is essential for a democracy as critics of government and as investigators of wrongdoing. It is a forum for discussion and debate.

The constitutions of all modern states include some reference to the role of media. No state, however allows absolute freedom of expression. All constitutions, therefore, indicate parameters within which media is to function. All states operate codes which provide for restrictions on the content of videos, films, and television programmes. For instance, Article 270 of the penal code related to Media laws in Poland, stipulates that anyone who "publicly insults, ridicules, and derides the Polish nation, the Polish People's Republic, its political system, its principal organs" is punishable by six months to eight years in prison. Article 273, further stipulates imprisonment up to 10 years for any one who violates Article 270 in the print or mass media.¹⁸ Even in India, there is a Censor Board which censors the films and gives them certificates which allow them to be screened. Recently, Indian government has banned scenes in films which depict characters smoking.¹⁹

Rival Theories of Media

There are many rival theories and contrasting views about the organization and regulation of media and its political impact.

¹⁸ Freedom House, "Nations in Transit: 1999/2000" Freedom House:2000, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/nitransit/2000/pdfdocs.htm>

¹⁹ "No Smoking on Screen", in *The Times of India*, 1 June 2005.

Liberal Theory

The notion of free press is greatly valued by liberalism. The free press is defined as a medium which allows for a diversity of ideas and opinion; it is not an agent of a single view or of state propaganda. The media is free in the sense that it is not subject to centralized control. Only by, anchoring the media to the free-market, in this view, it is possible to ensure the media's complete independence, from the government. Once, media is subject to state regulation, it tends to lose its bite as a watchdog.

The first argument for a free press, according to Keane, was derived from the writings of the poet John Milton, who was greatly concerned about the tyrannous effects of religious orthodoxy. He was a vehement critic of religious censorship and an advocate of religious tolerance. He argued that people had to be free to follow their conscience and able to test their convictions against rival claims, there by strengthening their faith. Any attempt to impose a particular view would be counterproductive.²⁰

Milton's seventeenth century rationale for non-interference is echoed in the nineteenth century by J.S. Mill, the most ardent champion of liberty. He has given importance to this freedom from the point of view of the individual as well as the society. For Mill, knowledge of the world depended upon constant cross-examination of conventional wisdom. In order to direct social policy wisely, it is necessary to ensure freedom to criticize the existing institutions and to put forward unpopular opinions, no matter how offensive they may be to the prevailing attitudes. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if

²⁰ John Street, *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy*, (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001), p.254.

wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by the collision with error.²¹ A free media is a necessary corollary of this.

Harold J. Laski, a twentieth century liberal was a great champion of freedom of speech and expression. According to Laski, a government can always learn more from the criticism of its opponents than from the eulogy of its supporters. To stifle that criticism is at least ultimately to prepare its own destruction.²²

The principal democratic role of the media, according to traditional liberal theory, is to act as a check on the state. The media should monitor the full range of state activity, and fearlessly expose the abuses of official authority. At first glance, this approach appears to have much to commend it. After all, critical surveillance of the state is clearly an important aspect of the democratic functioning of media. Exposure of the 'Watergate scandal' during the Nixon presidency or lesser known exploits such as press disclosures of the 'Narcogate' scandal in 1991 (Argentina), are heroic examples of the way in which media served society by investigating the abuses of authority by public officials.²³

But, this conventional view of media in a watchdog role is derived from the eighteenth century when the principal 'media' was public affairs oriented newspapers. By contrast, media systems in the early twenty-first century give over-emphasis on entertainment programmes. Even many so-called 'news media' allocate only a small

²¹ G.H. Sabine, *History of Political Theories*, (London: Oxford and IBH Publishers, 1937), pp.508&709-715.

²² Harold J. Laski, "Grammar of Politics", in O.P. Gawba, *An Introduction to Political Theory*, (London: Macmillan, 1981), p.296.

²³ James Curran, *Media and Power*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p.219.

part of their content to public affairs and a tiny amount to disclosure of official wrongdoing.

The watchdog argument also appears time-worn in another way. Traditionally, liberal theory holds that government is the sole object of press vigilance. This derives from a period when government was considered to be the 'seat' of power. However, this traditional view fails to take account of the exercise of economic power by shareholders and managers of a media company.

A revised conception is needed in which the media is conceived as being a check on both public and private authority. This manifestation diminishes the case for 'market freedom' since it can no longer be equated with independent from all forms of power.²⁴

A growing section of the world's media has been taken over by major industrial and commercial concerns. The issue is no longer simply that the media is compromised by their links to big business, media itself is big business now. A series of mergers has tended to incorporate the formerly discrete domains of publishing, television, film, music, computers and telecommunications into a single massive 'infotainment industry'. The number of corporations dominating the US media shrank from an estimated fifty in 1983 to ten in 1997. Big media houses such as *Microsoft*, *AOL-Times Warner*, and Rupert Murdoch's *News Corporation* have accumulated so much economic and market power that no government can afford to ignore them. It is claimed plausibly that the media is generally less vigilant in relation to corporate than public bureaucracy abuse because it itself has become part of the corporate sector.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid,p.220.

²⁵ Ibid,p.228.

In response to this criticism classical liberals say that the state should be the main target of media scrutiny because the state has a monopoly of legitimate violence, and therefore the institutions to be feared most. For, this reason, it is especially important to establish a critical distance between the media and the government through private media ownership.

This seemingly persuasive argument ignores the way in which the world has changed since the early eighteenth century. Now private media organizations have become more profit oriented. The sphere of government has been greatly enlarged, with the result that political decisions more often affect the media more than ever, because the political parties now have to retain mass electoral support to stay in office. These cumulative changes have given rise to a relationship that is increasingly prone to corruption.²⁶ This can be seen in the case of India, where one can identify media groups which have close connections with some or the other political parties. For instance, *NDTV* with congress, *Aaj Tak* with BJP, *Jain TV* with BJP, *Kairali TV* of Kerala with CPM, *The Hindu* with CPM, Media experts John Nicholas and Robert W. Mcchesney have said that "in the US, both the Republican and Democratic parties, with only a few prominent exceptions, have been and are in the pay roll of the corporate media and communication giants".²⁷

In his famous book "Rich Media, Poor Democracy", Mcchesney has challenged the assumption that a society drenched in commercial information "choices" is ipso fact a democratic one. He argues that the major beneficiary of the so-called information is wealthy investors, advertisers, and a handful of enormous media,

²⁶ John Street, *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp.252-255.

²⁷ Robert W. Mcchesney, "Third World Traveller: Media Control", http://www.third-world-traveller.com/Media_control_propaganda/Media_Control.html

computer and telecommunication corporations. This concentrated control by corporates, is disastrous for any notion of participatory democracy.²⁸

Still more serious is the way in which the market can silence media watchdogs altogether. Many privately owned media organizations supported right wing military coups in Latin American countries. This collusion was typified by *Al Mercurio*, which backed the military coup in Chile, loyally supported the Pinochet dictatorship and largely overlooked violation of human rights. Similarly, the *Globo* television network gave unconditional support to the military regime in Brazil, while most of Argentina's privately owned media failed to investigate state-sponsored 'disappearances' during the period of military rule.²⁹

Marxist Critic of Liberal Democratic Media

The classical Marxism, related mainly to Marx and Engels, was economic-determinism. According to this perspective, the structure of society may be understood in terms of its base (the foundation) and superstructure (external build up). Base consists of the mode of production while superstructure is represented by its legal and political structure, religion, morals social practices, literature, art, culture, media etc. It means that the superstructure is not autonomous, that it does not grow out of itself, but emerges on the foundation of the economic structure of society. The economic structure or the mode of production itself changes with the development of forces of production (i.e., means of production and labour power). This would bring about corresponding changes in the superstructure. Thus, according to classical Marxism, the

²⁸ Robert W. Mcchesney, "*Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*", www.Press.willinois.edu/f99/mcchesney.html

²⁹ James Curran, *Media and Power*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.220-21.

character of media will reflect the economic structure or base of society. For example, the media in a feudal society will be controlled by landlords and by capitalists in a capitalist society. Full freedom of media could be realized only in a communist or classless society.³⁰

However, Neo-Marxists have realized that superstructure is by no means a weak structure. In capitalist systems, superstructure could be so strong that it may serve to strengthen the base itself. Hence, it needs independent analysis. Among the Neo-Marxists, Gramsci has worked extensively on media. He says that the media propagates bourgeois ideas and maintains capitalist hegemony. He put media in the category of structure of legitimation which is called civil society. This civil society is based on consent. In the capitalist society media plays leading role in creating consent which keeps the system going.³¹ In other words, ownership ultimately determines the political and other views that the mass media disseminate and ownership is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small number of global media corporations. From this perspective, media plays an important role in promoting capitalism and globalization, in so far as it tends to spread ideas, images and values that are compatible with western consumerism, or which help to open up new markets and extend business penetration worldwide.

Noam Chomsky and Ed Herman, the two left leaning intellectuals have identified 'filters' through which news and political coverage are distorted by the structures of media itself.

³⁰ C.L. Wayper, *Political Thought*, (London: English University Press, 1958),pp.194-202.

³¹ Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981),pp.23-30.

These filters are as follows:

- The business interest of the ownership companies
- A sensitivity to the views and concerns of advertisers and sponsors
- The sourcing of news and information from 'agents of power' such as government and business-backed think tanks.
- 'flak' or pressure applied to journalists including threats of legal action.
- An unquestioning belief in the benefits of market competition and consumer capitalism.

Chomsky's analysis emphasizes the degree to which the mass media can subvert democracy, helping for instance, to mobilize support in the USA for instance, to pursue what he says are imperialist foreign policy goals.³²

Herbert Marcuse, a famous Neo-Marxist, has brilliantly analyzed the alienation of man in contemporary capitalist society. In his "one-dimensional man: studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society (1964)", he has argued that capitalism exercises monopolistic control not only on production and distribution, it also creates the desire and demand for commodities through a clever manipulation of mass media. This results in the widespread craze for consumer goods which develops into a distorted second nature of man. Consumer capitalism, with the help of media, renders the oppressed sections insensitive to their original discontent, by stimulating their trivial material desires which can be easily satisfied. Under the spell of gratification of these trivial desires, the genuine urge for freedom disappears.³³ Thus,

³² Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New*, (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp.30-31.

³³ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studying in the ideology of Advanced industrial society*, (Boston: Beacon Publishers, 1964), pp.3-18.

Marcuse has brilliantly analysed how media is used by major corporations to sell their products. They create unnecessary necessity.

Such criticisms however, to an extent underestimate the extent to which the press and broadcasters, particularly public service broadcasters, pay attention to progressive, social and development issues. For instance, clips on AIDS awareness, documentaries against child labour etc. Moreover, the assumption that media output shapes political attitude is determinist and neglects that the role played by people's own values in filtering, and possibly resisting media messages cannot be totally ruled out. As it can be seen in the case of Andhra Pradesh in India, the media glorified Chandrababu Naidu for his liberal economic reforms and consequently economic growth in Andhra Pradesh. He had become the poster boy of pro-globalization lobby but people rejected him in the election. While it is also true that media plays an important role in the creation of a person's belief and value system.

Elite Value Critic of Liberal Democratic Media

It suggests that editors, journalists and broadcasters enjoy significant professional independence, and that even the most interventionist of media tycoons is able only to set a broad political agenda, but not to control day-to-day editorial decisions. Thus, media's political bias reflects the value system of groups that are disproportionately represented amongst its senior professionals.

One version believes that the anti-socialist and politically conservative views of most mainstream newspapers and magazines and television stations derive from the fact that their senior professional are well-paid and generally belong to middle class background. Danny Schechter, a media critic in his article, "Dung on All Their

Houses", has said that "the programmers and channel controllers from all stations are part of the same well-paid elite, steeped in the same values, committed to the mission of maximizing audience share and profits. They are chosen for their ability to play the game and not challenge the audience with too many controversial ideas or critical perspectives. It is no surprise that they circulate easily within the commanding heights of media power, moving from company to company and job to job.³⁴

A quite different argument is advanced by conservatives, who think that the media is dominated by western educated liberal intellectuals whose value system and beliefs are quite different from the masses. Masses generally happen to be tradition bound. They believe in traditions, customs etc. but these western educated media persons take all these things as nonsense. This can be seen in the case of media bashing of sati, child marriage, dowry system, caste system, religious orthodoxy etc.

Another version is of feminist hue. This version believes that the media is dominated by male professional so they give less attention to women's views and issues pertaining to women.³⁵

This elite value critic of liberal media helps us understand, why the range of political views expressed by the mass media is often more restricted than liberal pluralists suggest, but it fails to take full account of the pressures that bear upon media professionals: these, for example include the views and interests of owners and commercial considerations, notably "rating" figures.

³⁴ Danny Schechter, "Dung on all their Houses", *Toward Freedom*, Dec-Jan,2000, http://www.thirdworldtraveller.com/Media_control_propaganda/Media_control_html

³⁵ Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp.203-4.

Market Mechanistic Theory

This theory is very close to liberal theory. It holds that newspapers and TV channels reflect, rather than shape the views of the common masses. It happens because profit maximization is the main motive of the media owners. They therefore give the people 'what they want' and cannot afford to alienate existing or potential viewers or readers by presenting political view-points with they may disagree. Such considerations may be less pressing in relation to public service broadcasters.³⁶

Although, this theory dismisses the idea that the media are political institutions, it acknowledges how media coverage can affect the focus and style of political debate. One aspect of this has been a growing interest in the personal lives and private conduct of political figures, at the expense of serious issues and ideological questions. Non-news is being made news and serious news is being avoided. For example, media is more interested in finding, "a particular celebrity is going around with whom" than a serious socio-political issue. One can see the emergence of page 3 journalism where main concern of media is private lives of socialites. Media has become obsessed with images rather than policies. This is a conscious effort to 'sell' politics to a mass audience that is deemed to be little interested in issues and policies.

Theory of Communication Imperialism

This theory corresponds to Marxist interpretation. According to this theory, twentieth century multinational or transnational corporations (MNCs or TNCs) performed the same functions as eighteenth and nineteenth century imperial armies. It

³⁶ Ibid p.206.

is the MNCs and TNCs that come, see and conquer through the manipulation of wants, needs and desires through media and make the third world believe that development could come only through the continuation of the existing global system. This theory argues that domination today is maintained through persuasion rather than armies. Mass media or communication TNCs play an important role in this persuasion. The articulation of a cultural/information imperialism, a component of dependency theory, was the work of a North American, Herbert Schiller. His explanation of cultural domination analysed that the west, especially the US, was all powerful in information, the coin of new information age, and that information was increasingly the business of the MNCs any TNCs.³⁷

According to this theory, the reason, why "Dallas" and "Disney cartoons" are as popular in the third world as they are in the US, not because of the universal appeal of fantasy programming but because the communication TNCs first created the demand for it, then sold the programmes to satisfy the demand. Similarly he argues the third world countries rely heavily on the western news agencies. Not because, the western agency files are fast, reliable and interesting, but because the TNCs that controlled the news prevented the development of alternative organizations to challenge their hegemony. In a series of books, Schiller linked major segments of the US economy to a conscious effort to use mass media and other forms of communication to stride across the world in a way reminiscent of the imperial armies of earlier centuries. He says "unavailable to expansionist of earlier times, modern mass communication perform a double service for the present-day controllers...Abroad, the

³⁷ William H. Melody, "The Information Society: Implications for Economic Institutions and Market Theory", in Edward A. Connor, (ed.) *The Global Political Economy of Communication, Hegemony, Telecommunication and the Information Economy*, (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp.12-14.

antagonism to a renewed though perhaps less apparent colonial servitude, has been quite successful (to date) deflected and confused by the images and messages which originate in the US but which flow continuously over and through local information media... Expanding across all continents, the sphere (of US investment and trade) grows significantly larger year by year. A powerful communication system exists to secure, not grudging submission by an open armed allegiance in the penetrated areas, but by identifying the American presence with freedom-freedom of trade, freedom of speech and freedom of enterprise.³⁸

It can be seen from above analysis, how Western Media particularly US media houses have monopolized the information system in the world through their big media giants.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be argued that media is like instrument. It can serve different ends. It all depends upon the system in which it works. The political culture of liberal democracies is very alert to the threat posed by governments to the freedom of public media. The autonomy of publicly regulated broadcasting is also supported by a system of checks and balances, while this varies from country to country, it usually includes in Western Europe, a number of the following features: the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression, formal rules requiring broadcasting impartiality, enshrined in the law; civic society or all-party representation on broadcasting authorities, funding by license fee rather than direct government control; diversity of broadcasting organizational structures, and devolution of authority within them. The

³⁸ Robert L. Stevenson, *Communication Development and the Third World*, (London: Longman, 1988), pp.36-37.



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ultimate safeguard of broadcasting independence is that it has generally support of the public. It can be seen elaborate checks and balances have been established in old liberal democracies as well as in new democracies to shield public media from the state. Yet, equivalent checks have not been developed to shield private media from their corporate owners, which is threatening the very foundation of democracy.

In sum, the free market is not the only way or best way to secure fearless media watchdogs that serve democracy. Instead, practical steps should be taken to shield the media from the corruption generated by both the political and economic system. Media should empower people by enabling them to explore where their interest lies. It should sustain vigilant scrutiny of government and other centers of power.

CHAPTER-2

MEDIA IN HUNGARY

After the 'revolution' of 1989 in Hungary, liberal constitution was adopted. Since then, several acts of liberal legislation in the field of communication have been passed which permitted the development of a "free Media". In this chapter an attempt is made to discuss and analyze the role, which media played during the democratic revolution of 1989. How and to what extent media has helped in further democratization of Hungary. It has also discussed how much independence media has come to enjoy in post-communist Hungary. How free the media is is an important question as free media is seen as a hallmark of democracy. Robert A. Dahl, who has worked extensively on democracy, has given foremost importance to media freedom. He has argued that along with freedom of expression, availability of independence sources of information is one of the basic criteria of democracy which is needed for enlightened understanding.¹

The Communist Legacy

Before 1989, the situation of the media in Hungary was different. Nearly, all the media in Hungary functioned under the guidance of communist regime, backed by the communist party. The government possessed a quasi-totalitarian monopoly in this field, strongly reinforced by censorship. The media acted as extension of the party

¹ Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, (New York: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 95-97.

apparatus. They functioned as a ‘transmission belt’ that communicated the will of the party to the masses.²

In an attempt to monopolize information, alternative news sources were eliminated by, among other things, the production of wired radio sets that only received domestic broadcasts, as well as the jamming of foreign radio transmissions. Radio and television were under direct party control. Newspapers, radio stations, and television channels were run by the state and party organs. The chief editors of the major news media were party cadres or directly appointed by the party. These all initiatives were taken to prevent the spread of bourgeoisie’s ideology as it would become stumbling block in the development of socialist state. There were no specific press laws or broadcasting acts during 1948-56. The media was regulated by paragraph 64 of the Hungary’s 1949 constitution. The article laid down that “in the Hungarian People’s Republic, the freedom of press and the freedom of association are guaranteed in accordance with the interests of socialism and the people”.³

The constitutional provision, although formally recognized the freedom of expression, but this freedom was to be used to further the cause of Socialism. Bourgeoisie ideas were not tolerated as they could undermine people’s democracy.

Limited Media Independence

However, it must be recognized that, in Hungary a real diversity of official media existed well before 1989, and that not all the media was directly under party control. It happened because after 1956 uprising communist government gave some

² Peter Bajmoi, Lazar, “Freedom of the Media in Hungary, (1990-2002), Ph D Thesis, “www.ceu.h4/Pol_Sci/dissertations/Bajmoi.Thesis_Edited.doc,p5.1

³ Ibid, 5.1.1.1.

freedom to media with certain restrictions and this freedom was enlarged in a phased manner. In late 1980s, the independence of media came to a satisfactory extent. This initiative was taken to pacify the people who were demanding this freedom. This type of policy was also the result of the existence of relatively strong forces within civil society. The question of liberalization of the media and the freedom of speech were very important issues of the opposition democratic movement.⁴

During the later phase of 1980s taking advantage of the environment of limited liberalization mass communication became increasingly diverse and open. Specifically overt mechanisms of censorship gave way to more informal means of control. Most notable was the idea of a tiered censorship, in what came to be known as the ‘three t’s’. *tamogatott, turt, tiltott* (supported, tolerated and forbidden).⁵ This system relied less on direct party oversight than on self-censorship; journalists and editors were expected to anticipate which kinds of reporting were acceptable in the media and which were not. What was supported, tolerated, or forbidden was never entirely clear, often depending on context- for example, television versus radio, print versus electronic media, regional versus national, or party-versus state owned media.

This system created a confused situation of control and openness. The party sought to allow free speech to pacify the population yet at the same time did not want this openness to undermine the legitimacy of the socialist-state itself.

⁴ Marcin Frybes, “The Transformation of media in Post Communist Central Europe”, in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and South Eastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure Since 1989* (London: Praeger Pub., 2000),p.52.

⁵ Richard A. Hall and Patrick H. O’Neil, “Institutions, Transitions, and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania, in Patric H. O’Neil (ed), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub, 1998),p.128.

Journalists, dominated by young intelligentsia who remained attracted to the profession because of its openness “tried to probe the boundaries of the system in a continual effort to extend them”.⁶ Thus, media freedom went hand in hand with occasional crackdowns against individuals and media outlets. Even in this situation, intellectual monthlies like *Alfold* or *Mozga vilag* possessed a certain margin of autonomy. In 1988, the government decided to stop jamming foreign radio stations like *Radio Free Europe*, *Voice of America*, *BBC*, *Deutsche Welle*, and others.⁷

The most outstanding initiative towards liberalization of media was the dissolving of the department of propaganda and abolishing the centralized system of press controls by communist party of Hungary in 1988.⁸ Besides, in the beginning of 1990, under the last communist government, the 1986 press law was modified. It was a significant landmark as it abolished the licensing of newspapers and hence the government’s direct control over ownership.⁹

Thus, it can be derived from the above analysis that media in Hungary during communist system worked under the supervision and control of the communist party but communist party under pressure gave limited independence after 1956 revolution and it grew in a positive direction. In this way media policy of communist Hungary contrasted sharply with other communist regimes of the region.

⁶ Elmer Hankiss, *East European Alternatives*, (London: Oxford Pub., 1990),p.103.

⁷ Marcin Frybes, “The Transformation of media in Post Communist Central Europe”, in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and South Eastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure Since 1989*, (London: Praeger Pub., 2000),p.53.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Peter Bajmoi, Lazar, “Freedom of the Media in Hungary, 1990-2002, Ph D Thesis, “[www.ceu.h4/Pol_Sci/dissertations/Bajmoi.Thesis Edited.doc](http://www.ceu.h4/Pol_Sci/dissertations/Bajmoi.Thesis%20Edited.doc),p7.2.

The Role of Media in Transformation of the Communist Regime

The transition in Hungary lacked a single specific, formative event that was common elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Rather, its political erosion began as early as 1987, when Hungary began to slide into economic crisis and party delegitimization. The bloody 1956 revolution had already emphasized the people's antipathy towards communist government. Janos Kadar, the Communist leader who succeeded in getting executed Imre Nagy, a reform communist and leader of the 1956 revolution, had been moving only gradually towards a more liberal system known as "goulash (liberal) communism". Kadar remained popular during 60s and 70s, when Hungary enjoyed modest prosperity. He came under severe criticism in the 1980s when Hungary, along with other East European countries, lagged behind the west in economic growth and political freedom. This created ground for people's disappointment with communist regime to grow.

Journalists and many communication scholars routinely argue that the media played a major role in the overthrow of communist government in Hungary, most often citing the television pictures of East Germans leaving for the west through Hungary, the broadcasters of *Radio Free Europe* and other international service, and new media technologies, especially videotapes.¹⁰

By 1987, an opposition had been established and underground publications proliferated. While the central party organ, *Nepszabadsag* continued to toe the party line, dailies linked to the state began to exhibit more reformist views, attempting to position themselves in anticipation of a transfer of power. The official press-organ of

¹⁰ Owen V. Johnson, "The Media and Democracy in Eastern Europe" in Patrick H.O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub., 1998), p111.

the Hungarian Patriotic forum, *Magyar Nemzet*, became the major daily newspaper of the liberal opposition by the end of 1980s, and many of the well known Hungarian opposition intellectuals published their articles in it.¹¹

The media as a reflection of party-state battles reached its climax in early 1989, when politburo member and noted reformer Imre Pozsgay took advantage of a weekly radio show to reject the party's version of 1956 as a "counter revolution", calling it instead a "popular uprising" that was justified against Stalinist regime. His utterances led to further paralyze the party and legitimize critical discourse among society, giving added strength to a process of liberalization already under way.¹²

Although the Hungarian media played an important role as a measure of internal party state battles, its impact was more important as a conduit of civil society and increasingly as an actor in its own right. The existing press quickly shook off its self-imposed system of censorship, involving itself in critical investigations and reporting the things unofficially restricted by the regime. By mid-1989, many regional and national publications began to distance themselves from the party-state, some even stripping the usual exhortation "proletarian of the world, unite," from their mastheads.¹³

Thus, it can be argued that the limited independence that media enjoyed, under the pressure of civil society, helped democratic groups to consolidate and expand their

¹¹ Marcin Frybes, "The Transformation of media in Post Communist Central Europe", in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and South Eastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure Since 1989*, (London: Praeger Pub., 2000),p.53.

¹² Richard A. Hall and Patrick H. O'Neil, "Institutions, Transitions, and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania, in Patric H. O'Neil (ed), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub., 1998),p.131.

¹³ Ibid,p.131.

ideas. Many publications which were considered close to communist regimes started to take U-turn and criticize the government.

Three important incidents took place which was broadcast by media, especially through television which undermined the legitimacy of communist government. These incidents are being discussed below.

Three Media Events and their Influence

As discussed, media played a major role in the democratic revolution of 1989 in Hungary. Three events particularly are of utmost importance which played important role in increasing the mass appeal of democratic groups and bringing down of the communist government. The first event was that of March 15, 1989 celebration of the revolution of 1848. The communist party hoped to fit the anniversary into its scheme of “marginalizing the opposition by incorporating it”. They invited non-communist organizations to participate in their commemoration as a celebration of national unity in which everyone wanting “democracy” and a “multi-party system” could march together under the communist party’s slogans for “renewal”.¹⁴

But, several democratic groups such as Hungarian Patriotic Forum etc. organized their own march separately in which more than 10,000 people participated and overshadowed the official ceremonies. This appeared to be like a show of strength. These two separate ceremonies were televised in almost every Hungarian home, ordinary citizen and communist party member alike could see clearly for himself which was the large demonstration and foresee which side would grow larger in future demonstrations.

¹⁴ Le Edwards, *Media Politik: How the media transforms the world politics*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub., 2001),p.133.

Evidence of the increasing impact of the country's more democratic media politick came only eight days later when representatives of the alternative organizations met and organized themselves into the "Opposition Round Table" seeking, as in the Polish model, to involve the people in the political process. The formation of this "ORT" fundamentally altered Hungarian politics, uniting and radicalizing the opposition, whose guiding principle was not "power sharing" but genuinely free, fully contested election.¹⁵

Throughout the spring, local communist organizations defected from the official party line and an increasing number of communist parliamentarians declared their independence. Almost everyday media brought the announcement of another "alternative organization". More and more high-ranking communist party officials revealed that they had "always" been reformers. In April, Prime Minister Miklos Nemeth took the unprecedented step of using an evening television news programme to repudiate a speech by Party Chief Grosz and to distance himself from the communist party hierarchy. "The government was clearly separating itself from the party". Laszlo Bruszt of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences points out.¹⁶

There was another media event on May 1 1989. On this occasion also there was a show of strength by opposition as well as by communist government. The league of independent Trade Unions associated with the opposition and mobilized around one lakh people which was a larger gathering than mobilization done by communist party. This significant disparity in public support was again noted by the national television audience. Separate public forums were held after the rallies and

¹⁵ Ibid, p.133.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.134.

televised; the independent unions contact among television reporters, producers yielded equal coverage.

The third and the most important of the three media events in the spring of 1989, which transformed the anti-communist opposition in Hungary into a major political force, was a ceremony honouring Imre Nagy, who had led the 1956 uprising against Soviet domination. On June 16, an estimated 250,000 people gathered at Heroes square in Budapest to give Nagy, who had been hanged and thrown into prison grave, a solemn funeral and a hero's burial. The people present, along with national television audience, heard the names of fallen martyrs as well as speeches honouring the executed prime minister and denouncing still present Soviet army.

In keeping with the newly expanded media freedom, the government televised the ceremony live. Four top communist party officials including minister of state Imre Pozsgay, laid wreaths and served as honorary pallbearers flanking Nagy's coffin but left before the eulogies to Nagy that condemned the communist party and Soviet Union. Consequently, they did not hear a leader of the Federation of Young Democrats paying tribute to Nagy as someone who, although a life long communist, "identified himself with the wishes of the Hungarian nation to put an end to the communist taboos, blind obedience to the USSR and the dictatorship of a single party". The significance of this ceremony lies in the fact that only a few months back, communist party Chief Grosz had ruled out any talk about Nagy's rehabilitation, and on the 30th anniversary of his hanging the previous June, the police brutally broke up a small tribute organized by dissidents.¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid., p.135.

Thus, it is evident from the above analysis that the media played a crucial role in the democratic revolution. The print and broadcast media slowly went out of the hands of the ruling communist regime. Several publications played important role in terms of spreading the ideas of democracy among the masses. TV channels by broadcasting demonstrations of democratic groups, like the three mentioned above helped in expanding and consolidating the mass base of democratic groups. People started to realize that the communist regime was no longer so powerful to fight against. In this along with domestic media, foreign media also played a big role.

Popular Election of 1989

By the end of 80s demand for elections gathered momentum. People under the leadership of democratic groups were demanding for early elections. Facing a united opposition, fearful of a 1956 type uprising, reform communists led by Imre Poszgay decided to go for open elections. They calculated that they could use their superior resources, organization and nationally recognized candidates to defeat the opposition.

Their confidence was damaged by “Duna-gate” scandal, a combination of the Hungarian word or the Danube river, Duna, and the international suffix meaning political scandal which dominated media coverage and political debate in January 1990. An officer in the Hungarian secret police revealed that the police continued to spy on members of opposition and to keep records of meetings and events with the help of the officer, a television news crew, practicing a kind of investigative journalism entered police headquarter of Bučapest and filmed files about recent political activities of opposition parties.¹⁸ This led to massive negative publicity of

¹⁸ Ibid. p.135.

secret police and there was a demand for its dismantling. The government immediately sacked the chief of the secret police and control of this secret agency was placed under the prime minister. These moves were used as face-saving mechanisms. But this “Duna-gate” episode worked in favour of opposition in the election. The reform communists, under their new name, the Hungarian Socialist Party, desperately tried to improve their anti-communist credential through frequent public meetings with western leaders but in vain.¹⁹

Once confident that they would be the first communists to win a popular election, the Hungarian Socialist Party ended up with only 8 percent of the parliamentary seats in the March and April 1990 elections. They would not have suffered such crushing defeat, had their opposition not engaged in shrewd democratic media politick in the spring and summer of 1989. The nationally televised broadcast of the three above mentioned events enabled the opposition to carry its messages of patriotism and democracy into the homes of the Hungarian people and present itself as an attractive political alternative to the reform communists. Without media there would not have been a peaceful transition in Hungary.

Political Battle over the Media

Since 1989, the media have quickly become a source of struggle between various political actors whose concern with the consolidation of political power often conflicted with the concept of a free press. After elections, new democratic regime came to power. Democracy was established but again new ruling elites who were democratically elected tried to influence the media from within and outside. They tried

¹⁹ Thomas O, Melia, Hungary: in the New Democratic Frontier, pp.56-57.

to appoint their men in public media and silence the publications airing opposite opinions.

The Hungarian elections of 1990 led to the defeat of communist party now renamed as Hungarian Socialist Party. This election was won by a coalition of conservative and populist parties- central among them, the Hungarian Democratic Forum. This Democratic Forum led government attempted to carry out the process of economic and political transformation. This was criticized by the new press, which branded these reformists as rightists unable to create effective policy. Although many of these criticisms were no doubt accurate as the coalition seemed unable to tackle the daunting tasks of fundamental reform. The government on its part saw this as the product of a biased and “crypto-communist” press that itself had escaped fundamental reform and now sided with its liberal allies in parliament. This was perhaps partly true, as the print media was still dominated by intelligentsia staff from the communist period, whose journalistic tendencies were against any kind of economic reforms and who mistrusted the values (bourgeoisie) of the new government.²⁰

The government thus sought to counter the print media through various tactics. Some papers that had not yet been privatized were sold to domestic and international investors who were considered more conservative. This move was in part facilitated by the fact that after the initial wave of foreign investment in 1990, several papers reverted to state hands after they were divested by their owners (Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell among them) usually for failing to turn a profit. In other cases, the remaining state-owned papers were purged and re-created as pro-government organs.

²⁰ Richard A, Hall and Patrick H. O’Neil, “Institutions, Transitions, and the Media: A comparison of Hungary and Romania”, in Patrick H. O’Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1998), p.136.

A third strategy was to create entirely new pro-government publications owned by industries that were themselves under state ownership.²¹ In the long run these tactics of government were not much successful. In 1993, for example the two daily newspapers considered to be pro-government, *Uj Magyarorszag* and *Pesti hirlap*, had a combined readership of about 1,60,000 compared with over one million for *Nepszabadsag*, the former central organ of communist party which had allowed a strong ideological continuity from the communist era. So, to counter the opposition policy and to garner public support, the government turned towards electronic media.²²

As part of the 1990 deal with the opposition free democrats in 1990, the government had agreed to appoint two well-known sociologists Elmer Hankiss and Csaba Gombar to head Hungarian Television and Radio until new media laws could be formed by government and parliamentary opposition. Both these sociologists were expected to fill these posts for no more than a year. Until that time, a moratorium on broadcast licenses was instated, inadvertently freezing the dominance of state-run radio and TV.²³

The negotiations for new media legislation began. While the government called for sweeping changes and staff purges in the electronic media, opposition forces sought legislation that would save television and radio from government influence. The government started confronting Hankiss and Gombar who did not undertake the radical reorganization of television and broadcasting that the government desired. Hankiss and Gowbar resisted these changes, and the government finally decided to

²¹ Ibid,p.137.

²² Ibid,p.138.

²³ Ian Traynor, "Latest Twist in Media war as Radio and TV heads are Removed", *IPI Report*, July-Aug. 1994,p.24.

dismiss them by arguing that the broadcast media had fallen into “alien hands” that did not truly represent Hungarian national values”. The government dismissed both of them. The situation took a serious turn when Hungarian president Arpad Goncz refused to countersign the dismissals, citing them as threats to democracy. Opposition forces in parliament now rallied around the president as a means of checking the government, and a final compromise bill on the media failed in parliament, garnering not a single vote.²⁴

In 1993, Hankiss and Gawbar finally decided to relinquish their positions, allowing government appointees to take their place. A purge of radio and television ensued in 1993-94, removing several journalists who were not associated with ruling regime in the name of budgetary constraints. This happened just when the country was preparing for 1994 parliamentary elections. As feared, radio and television were now turned into a propaganda machine of ruling party. The communist opposition was not given adequate space in the news coverage. Media broadcasts began to warn of a “liberal Bolshevik alliance” should the socialists and free democrats come to power. The government showed a documentary which depicted the current head of socialist party as a torturer during the 1956 uprising. These things, however could not work in favour of ruling alliance. The elections of spring 1994 led to a stunning defeat for the ruling alliance, while the socialists and free democrats emerged with nearly three quarters of the seats in parliament.

Thus, it can be seen how the media was misused by the post-communist government led by Democratic Front which used to blame communists for media-bias

²⁴ Andrew K. Milton, Bound but not Gagged: Media Reform in Domestic Transitions, *Comparative Political Studies*, 34 (5), June, 2001, p.495.

and using media as a propaganda machine. Conflict over the media did not end with these elections, however, although a media law was passed in late 1995 to give greater oversight power to all parties in parliament.

Media Laws in Hungary

After the end of communist regime and establishment of liberal democracy, in Hungary the state monopoly of media was abolished. Privatization of media was allowed and now public and private media exist side by side.

To regulate the media activities several mechanisms have been developed since 1990 which reached its zenith when in 1996, Radio and Television Act was adopted.

Press Laws

There is no comprehensive press law to regulate print media. The 'Press Law of 1986' is still in force with several modifications and additions. According to the Act, when publishing a periodical publication in the country, permission had to be requested from the information Bureau of the Cabinet. This regulation was revised in 1989, according to which "production and publication of periodicals, newspapers etc. involves the obligation of registration" but now the permission will be issued by the Ministry of Culture and Education.²⁵

Broadcasting Laws

Broadcast Media activities in Hungary are regulated by a law which was passed on December 21, 1995 and adopted in 1996. It created a number of structures

²⁵ Hungarain Press in the Last Ten Years Overview, 1987-97, www.ifla.org/iv/ifla.64/097_116e.html.

to safeguard the freedom of speech and remove information monopolies. The law aimed to establish the legal framework for public and private broadcasting and enable public service radio and TV stations to operate as public foundations. The first section of this law prescribes that, in broadcasts for the general audience, local broadcasts should constitute at least 20 percent of total broadcast time by 1999. According to second section of the law, in public and commercial broadcasting advertisements should not exceed an average of six minutes per hour. The third section of law says that 51 percent of programmes should be produced in Hungary and that 70 percent of total programme should be produced in Europe. Many media experts agree that the new media law is one of the most comprehensive in the post-communist states of East Central Europe.²⁶

National Radio and Television Board (ORTT)

The most important body created by the law is the National Radio and Television Board (ORTT), a regulatory agency charged with monitoring news broadcasts for equal treatment of all political parties. Under the law, boards of trustees overseeing the country's television and radio would be composed equally of governing party and opposition members. So, the members of ORTT are selected from nominees of almost all the major parliamentary parties. The President and the Prime Minister of Hungary jointly nominate its president. This board allocates frequencies and supervises the observations of media laws, including the appropriateness of the contents of the programmes. The ORTT gives its report to parliament and its members

²⁶ Freedom House Report on Hungarian Media, www.freedomhouse.org/nit98/hungary.html

cannot be recalled before the expiry of their terms. This board also deals with complaints from listeners and viewers.²⁷

Broadcasting Fund

This 1996 law also prescribes for the establishment of a broadcasting fund which gets its revenues from license fees and broadcasting fees. License fee is paid by viewers and broadcasting fee is paid by broadcasters. These fees collected from broadcasters and viewers are channeled to the public service media. Every household having a TV set pays a license fee. The annual amount of the fee is determined by a simple majority in parliament within the framework of annual budget.²⁸

Ironically, the law which had been viewed as one of the most comprehensive in the post-communist states of East Central Europe gradually became a tool for authorities to tighten control over the media. By March 2000, on the initiative of Orban government, parliament had approved that control-boards be composed entirely by governing party members. This decision to create pro-government boards sparked protests both in and outside the country. A European commission representative said that the action could damage Hungary's bid to join the EU, while NGOs, trade unionists and opposition party members staged protests. Hungary's chief prosecutor resigned in protest against the ruling coalition's increasingly draconian control of the media.

²⁷ The Hungarian Media Landscape, www.ejc.nl/jr/emland/hungary.html.

²⁸ Peter Bajmó, Lazar, "Freedom of the Media in Hungary, 1990-2002, Ph D Thesis, [www.ceu.hu/Pol_Sci/dissertations/Bajmoi.Thesis Edited.doc](http://www.ceu.hu/Pol_Sci/dissertations/Bajmoi.Thesis%20Edited.doc), p.6.2.

Penal Codes

There are also some penal codes which deal with media. On March 1996, the parliament passed a penal code that prescribes a three year imprisonment for “any one who incites hatred or acts in any other way that is capable of inciting against the Hungarian nation or any other national, ethnic, or religious minority or race.”²⁹ There are accusations that this penal code was used to harass the journalists who were trying to expose official abuses. This situation was further aggravated when a new law was adopted in March 2000. Under this law, anybody charged with intentionally committing a criminal act would be put on criminal file, including Libel. The Association of Hungarian Journalists called the law a violation of freedom of speech and an attempt to intimidate the media. The association noted that Hungarian journalists fearful of being treated as criminals are now likely to start censoring themselves and holding back news worthy information.³⁰

Thus, it can be seen from above analysis that though media laws and regulatory mechanisms were developed in Hungary to strengthen democracy. But there are loopholes in these laws and regulatory bodies which are being used against journalists with opposite opinions. But some hope is there that in future when public will become conscious and act as a watchdog of media, the ruling elites will be prevented from meddling into the independent working of media.

²⁹ Freedom House Report on Hungarian Media, www.freedomhouse.org/nit98/hungary.html

³⁰ “New Law seen as Intimidation of Journalists in Hungary” *International Journalists Network*, August 9,2000, www.ijnet.org/archive/2000/8/11-7331.html

Post-Communist Media

The initiation of market economy in Hungary after 1990 effected media ownership fundamentally. The ownership structure of the media was radically transformed from the communist time when all media was in public hands. The privatization of media in Hungary took place on a large scale. The media landscape of Hungary is now characterized by a duality of market principles and different forms of state intervention.

Hungary has 10 national and 24 local dailies. Almost all of these newspapers are privately owned, mainly by foreign media giants. When the newspapers came to the market, there was not enough Hungarian capital or interest in acquiring them, and no Hungarian government proposed restrictions on foreign ownership in the press. Of the 24 local dailies, *Axel Springer* owns 10; *WAZ (West Deutche Allgemeine Zeitung)* owns 5, *FUNK Gmbh* owns 3; and *Associated Newspapers* owns 3. Although there were several attempts to launch rival local newspapers, these attempts failed due to lack of capital and the inflexibility of local market.³¹

On the national newspaper market, the situation is somewhat different. Among political quality dailies, the old communist party newspaper, *Nepszabadsag*, managed to preserve its dominant position in the market, with a circulation of around 200,000. The second largest quality daily, *Magyar Nemzet*, has a circulation of around 100,000. The third and fourth political papers, *Magyar Hirlap*, *Nepszava* have a circulation of 49,000, and 31,000 respectively. All of these titles existed before 1989, and almost no new quality political daily managed to survive in the competitive market except for

³¹ The Hungarian Media Landscape, www.ejc.n1/jr/emland/hungary.html.

tabloids. The market for tabloid journalism emerged and flourished in the post-communist period only. In tabloid market, competition is severe. Currently, there are three foreign owned titles, *Blikk* with a circulation of around 200,000, which is the largest circulated magazine. Other two are *Mainap* and *Mailap* with a circulation of around 100,000. Another segment of the print press, which got a boost in post-communist period, is the magazine market. Lifestyle and fashion magazines like Hungarian edition of *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*, erotic magazines like *Playboy* as well as celebrity gossip weeklies were started in the 1990s.³²

Broadcast media have been the centre of much political argument since 1990. Before the collapse of communism commercial broadcasting did not exist, and the state controlled Magyar television enjoyed a monopoly. A decisive step in transforming MTV from state controlled monolith to a public service channel was the 1996 media law, which opened the way for creating a dual broadcasting system, modeled after Western European traditions.

Currently there are three terrestrial channels; *MTV*, the public service channel; *TV 2*, whose majority ownership is with Scandinavian Broadcasting System; and *RTL Klub*, which is owned by a consortium of *CLT*, *Bertelsmann*, *Pearson* and the *Hungarian National Telecom Company*. There is another TV called *Duna TV* which was launched in 1922, with the primary mission broadcasting to Hungarian minorities living outside the country. In 1999, it won the *UNESCO* prize for best cultural television. There are also several commercial channels accessible via cable or satellite as well as a host of local stations that cater to the needs of local news.

³² Ibid.

The radio scene is similar to that of television. The two major national commercial stations, foreign owned *Dannubius* and *Slager*, and three national public service stations (*Kossuth*, *Petofi*, *Bartok*) share the market with numerous local stations, ranging from commercial to public service.³³

Privatization of Media

The process of privatization of the media took place in a very wild manner. In Hungary, the privatization process began prior to the first democratic elections of May 1990 with an important scandal. The communist party decided to sell seven of the most important regional daily newspapers to the group of *Alex Springer*, one of the conditions of this sale was that the new owner would maintain the old management in all these daily newspapers.³⁴

According to government devised rule for privatization which is in force now, no single company is allowed to hold more than 49 percent stake, and Hungarians must hold at least 26 percent stake.³⁵ More than 80 percent of print media and approximately 70 percent of radio and TV stations are in private hands. Foreign investors played a central role in the process of privatization. This was quite natural, at the beginning of the transition period; there were no capital funds available for investment. Foreign investors began entering Hungary's print media sector soon after the old system of licensing was abolished in 1989. In 1996, the radio and broadcasting law was adopted. It also provides a minimum level of Hungarian ownership in a

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Freedom House Report on Hungarian Media, www.freedomhouse.org/nit98/hungary.html

³⁵ Marcyn Frybes, "The Transformation of media in Post Communist Central Europe", in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and South Eastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure Since 1989*, (London: Praeger Pub., 2000),p.56.

company. The two national channels, *TV2* and *TV3*, were merged into *TV2* in February 2000 by Scandinavian Broadcasting System (which unlike what its name suggests, is US-owned). State run Hungarian television *MTV* has been coping with financial problems, and by mid-1999 its tax debts reached US \$21 million. Massive lay offs were scheduled and drastic maintenance cuts were made in an attempt to solve financial problems.³⁶

The main foreign groups which are dominant in Hungarian media are, *Alex Springer*, Rupert Murdoch, Robert Hersant, Robert Maxwell, *Bertelsmann* etc. however, it must be noted that besides foreign groups, some national media groups have also emerged. Andrew Sarlos's group is the most important among them.

During the first stage of the post-communist era private media ownership was viewed as contributing towards strengthening democracy and lessening the influence of the state and political forces. This was the reason why foreign media ownership was welcomed among journalists and the public. It was perceived to provide publishers with the much-desired independence from political parties and organizations. However, as the 1990s proceeded, concerns were raised about the economic power of foreign media companies and the lack of effective oversight of the government and state institutions by media whose primary concerns were commercial rather than social or political. For their benefit, they are hobnobbing with governments which sympathize with their commercial considerations. This is not a symptom of healthy development of democratic media. In a situation of severe competition, serious and intellectual newspapers, journals have disappeared from the market or adapted

³⁶ Report of European Federation of Journalists on Hungary, www.ifj_europe.org/FOREIGN%20 OWNERSHIP%20 IN% 20CEE%20MEDIA%20COUNTRIES JUN E2003.doc.

themselves and changed their contents to market needs. Because there is a boom in gossip magazines and they have to compete with them. Due to lack of capital many of the publications have been sold out to foreign media groups. It is true that availability of variety of media has strengthened democracy as people can choose which media source is genuine but the problem is that in a severe market competition big fish eats small fishes, and market is monopolized by a few big media giants, as it is happening in Hungary. For instance, in terms of market share, the Swiss media company *Axel Springer* alone currently controls two-third of the national newspaper market. Besides, gossip magazines' market is booming at the expense of serious publications which is not a healthy sign.³⁷

Media Freedom

Press freedom is a pre-condition for pluralist democracy and for an open society. The press and media keep citizens informed, and thus help them make a decision when casting their ballot. They watch out for misuse of power, and they empower politically and socially backward groups by enabling them to participate in public deliberation.

Although, the regulatory mechanism was developed in Hungary in 1996 for the regulation of radio and television, it has been blamed of political bias. In 1998, the deputy of opposition party "Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), Ivan Petoe, who is also Deputy chairman of the Parliamentary Cultural Committee, criticized the enlargement of media board of trustees, as this move was with a motive to create a two third majority of ruling party (Conservative Party) in major institutions such as

³⁷ The Hungarian Media Landscape, www.ejc.nl/jr/emland/hungary.html.

Hungarian Radio, Duna TV and the Hungarian News Agency. The opposition Hungarian Socialist Party also regarded this development as a serious violation of the law on radio and television broadcasting.³⁸

In January 1999, five members of the Hungarian Radio Public Trust objected to the fact that over the past few months, ruling party politicians were given too much air time in news and magazine programmes. They referred to a survey conducted by the National Radio and Television Authority (ORTT). According to this survey, in November 1998 the government side was given 82 percent of the air time in Hungarian Radio's "Chronicle" and other news programme, while the opposition accounted for only 18 hours.³⁹

As already discussed, a penal code which mandates a three-year prison sentence, for "anyone who incites hatred or acts in any other way that is capable of inciting against the Hungarian nation or any other national, ethnic, or religious minority or race". This penal code was used in several cases against journalists who were writing or speaking against official abuses. For instance, in June 1999, the country was plunged into a row over government control of state media following the arrest of *Laszlo Juszl*, presenter on television crime show, "Kriminalis", on suspicion of breaching state secrets. Hungarian television terminated his show and sacked him, while police searched his house and office. He had disclosed government documents that undermined the claims of prime minister and his entourage to have been put under surveillance by the previous socialist-led government.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Hungarian Press Overview, www.IJ.n.e.t.org/FE

The transformation of the Hungarian political and economic system in 1989 led to the belief that now media would be free from governmental influence. The print press was privatized and a dual broadcasting system was established. In recent years, however, press freedom has been repeatedly restrained both by political forces and business groups.

Economic pressure is a very serious obstacle to press freedom in Hungary. The media depends too much on advertising and it sometimes appears to be reluctant to publish or air anything that might jeopardize the interests of corporations and businesses that advertise. To further their economic interest some media groups avoid controversial issues related to party in power.

The domination of foreign interests in the media also creates uneasiness and concerns about press freedom. Local politicians have lamented that Hungary was being “encircled by western culture”, and on several occasions journalists protested against increased foreign ownership of their news organizations. Thus, reporters of *Nepszabadsag* daily revolted against the German *Bertelsmann* when it tried to increase its stake in the paper.

Thus, it can be derived from the above analysis that ruling elites have devised ways to intervene into the independent working of media even after the establishment of democracy. But one silver lining is there, at least democratic consciousness among people and intellectuals have developed which leads to the discussion and the criticism of governmental meddling in the free working of media, which no government of the day can escape. By and large the media environment of Hungary is proceeding in a

positive direction. This is evident from the table given below on the basis of survey done by Freedom House.

Table 2.1: Freedom House Survey of Media Freedom in Hungary (1994-2002)

Year	Score	Average score
1994	30	30
1995	38	
1996	34	
1997	31	
1998	28	
1999	28	
2000	30	
2001	28	
2002	23	

The higher the score, the intense the pressure on media

Score: (0-30-free), (31-60- partly free), (61-100- not free)

Source: www.freedomhouse.org/research/ratings.XLS

Each year, the Freedom House, a New York based non-profit organization conducts a study of press independence worldwide. According to its 1998 survey, Hungary is placed above Bulgaria, Romania, Russia and Slovakia in terms of media independence.⁴¹

Conclusion

In this chapter variety of phases, which media has passed has been discussed. During communist regime media worked under the guidance and direct supervision of the communist party. Bourgeoisie ideas were crushed as it could become an obstacle

⁴¹ Freedom House Annual Survey, www.freedomhouse.org/research/ratings.XLS

in the socialist development of Hungary. In the post-communist period, ruling elites have discovered new sophisticated means to interfere in the independent working of media for their electoral gains. Thus, democratization has not prevented governments of various hues from attempting to impose state control on media or to manipulate the media when in power. Nor has media independence brought with it neutrality, absence of partisanship, and equanimity many had hoped would develop. Though stifling control no longer exists it would be incorrect to say that in post communist period media is totally free of government control.

New laws, which could create solid foundations for free media to develop cannot alone guarantee media independence. These laws must be accompanied by a new political culture and by existence of strong civil society. Further, it may be argued that a very rapid implementation of market mechanism in media has not favoured the consolidation of civil societies. In many cases, the rules of market economy and the spirit of competition have contributed to the destruction of some of the elements of civil society that had begun to emerge during the 1980s. In competition with great international media-groups, smaller local initiatives perished as they were often inexperienced and poor and could not resist the severe market competition. Some old, ambitious and intellectual publications have totally disappeared from the market, and some others have lost their initial purposes and adapted themselves to market needs.

CHAPTER 3

MEDIA IN ROMANIA

Introduction

The events that took place in Romania in December 1989 led to the abolition of the Communist Party control on media. It enabled journalists to take a new position in the society and to exercise their profession, theoretically at least without any interference, except for their own judgment and moral considerations. Since then, Romanian media has evolved in different directions. On the one hand, many newspapers, along with some new audiovisual outlets, oriented themselves towards sensationalism and tabloid style journalism in order to keep audiences which seem to need entertainment rather than information. On the other hand, some media outlets started to address the new category of profit-motivated entrepreneurial people that emerged with the market oriented economy and demanded objective and niche-oriented information.

The evolution of the media in post-communist Romania has, however, not only been market and audience driven but has also been greatly influenced by politics. The birth or survival of too many newspapers, radio and TV stations often depend on the interests of political and economic circles using the media as a tool to gain influence and political power. A certain inclination of Romanian politicians for media control has brought about criticism from local and international organizations.

This chapter reviews the main media structure, under communist rule. It examines the role of media in the democratic revolution of 1989 in Romania and in the

post-communist liberal democratic system. Lastly, the chapter attempts to summarize the main challenges facing the contemporary media in Romania.

Media during Communist Period

Before the revolution of 1989, the media was under the control of the Communist Party of Romania. The media was used to garner support for the building of socialist state and regime's domestic and foreign policies and during Ceausescu's period, to consolidate his personal power. The system of media control was highly centralized and involved an interlocking group of party and state organizations, supervising bodies, and operating agencies, whose authority extended to all radio and televisions facilities, film studios, printing establishments, newspapers and book publishers and to the single news agency. The control apparatus also regulated public access to foreign publications, films, newscasts, books and radio and television programmes.

The 1965 constitution promised freedom of information, but expressed the reservation that "it cannot be used for aims hostile to the socialist system and to the interest of the working people".¹ It means that media freedom was given there but bourgeoisie ideas were not tolerated, which could be used to undermine socialism and consequently the People's democracy.

In 1971, following a trip to China, Ceausescu reinforced Communist Party of Romania (PCR) authority over the highest bodies related to media in the government. The former state committee for culture and art, which was an element of the Council of Ministers, was reconstituted as the "Council for Socialist culture and education"

¹ Mass Media, Romania Table of Contents, "www.country studies.US/romanina/73html.14k

which was answerable to the Central Committee of the PCR. Similar changes were made in the committee of Radio and Televisions, which was renamed as the Council of Romanian Radio and Television. In 1985, a joint party-state organisation, the “National Council for Science and Education” was created which was chaired by Elena Ceausescu, wife of Ceausescu.² Its responsibility was to ensure uniform policy implementation in science, technology and education and it provided the regime another mechanism to guide educational activities.

The propaganda and media section of the central committee exercised general guidance and supervision of all publications and dissemination procedures. Its policies and directives, in turn, were implemented by government controlled agencies such as the Romanian Press Agency, individual publishing houses, printing establishments, and radio and television stations.

UNESCO, which collects statistics from all member states, reported that during the 1980s, the number of Romanian daily and periodical publications dropped sharply, whereas in 1969 Romania published fifty one dailies, twenty three weeklies, and two semi-weeklies, in 1985 there were only a thirty six dailies and twenty four weeklies. Daily newspapers had a total annual circulation of more than 1.1 billion copies. Major mass organizations, government-sponsored groups, local government organs, and the Communist Party of Romania (PCR) and its subsidiaries published the most important and influential newspapers.³

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Major mass organizations, government-sponsored groups, local government organs, and the PCR and its subsidiaries published the most important and influential newspapers.

The most authoritative newspaper, *Scinteia*, was founded in 1931 as the official organ of the central committee of the Communist Party and in the late 1980s had by far the largest daily circulation. It was the outlet for party policy pronouncements and semi government positions on national and international issues. After *Scinteia*, the most important daily was *Romania Libera*, established by the Socialist Unity Front in 1942. Although the paper featured issues of national and international importance, it concentrated mainly on local issues. This was the only paper which was allowed to publish one-page advertisement sections.⁴ *Scinteia Tineretului* was another daily which addressed the younger population and stressed the ideological and political training of youth as the basis for a "sound socialist society". The most important minority language newspapers were the Hungarian daily *Elore* and the German daily *Neuer Weg*. Both publications repeated the news of national newspapers but also featured items of minority interest. They promoted the official government position on such sensitive issues as Romanian-Hungarian tensions.⁵ After 1960, recognizing the importance of radio as a medium for informing the public and propagating the socialist ideas and values, the regime launched a large scale effort to build broadcasting facilities and manufacture receiving sets. The number of radio receivers increased from 2 million in 1960 to 3.2 million in 1989. Receivers and amplifiers that reached group audiences in public areas were installed throughout the

⁴ Romanian Media Landscape, "www.Ejc.nl/jr/emland/Romania.html"

⁵ Ibid.

country. In the 1980s, Romanian radio broadcast three programs on medium wave and FM. Until the mid-1980s, there were also six regional programs, with transmission in Hungarian, German, and Serbo-Croatian. Each week about 200 hours of broadcasts in 13 languages were beamed to foreign countries by *Radio Bucharest*.⁶

Since its inception in 1956, television broadcasting has been closely linked with radio as an increasingly important instrument of "socialist education of the masses". Like radio, televisions operated under the supervision of the council of Romanian Radio and Televisions, whose policy guidelines were received directly, from the party apparatus. Television frequently came under close scrutiny and criticism by the Central Committee and by national congresses on "socialist education". At the June 1982 central committee plenum and again in 1984, Ceausescu denounced the "polluting" influence of western propaganda and its impact on literacy, theatrical, film and artistic broadcasts and stated that radio and television should report current events from a Marxist-Leninist perspective. In 1989 there were approximately 3.9 million television sets in Romania. Following the energy crisis of 1984, the two TV Channels were merged and broadcasting was reduced from 100 to 22 hours per week. Programmes in Hungarian and German were dropped. Because of these cutbacks and the greater ideological content of the broadcasts, the number of viewers actually declined, and some people resorted to building their own antennae to receive Bulgarian and Soviet programmes.⁷

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Mass Media, Romania Table of Contents, "www.country.studies.US/romania/73html-14k

Media and 1989 Revolution

While discussing the role of the media in the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, role of domestic media as well as of foreign media both should be given importance. Since, Ceausescu regime was of very closed nature and there was the absence of even a brief period of liberalization prior to December 1989, it was virtually inevitable that foreign media would play a catalytic role during the initial stages of anti-Ceausescu protests. The role of catalyst next shifted to Romanian television on 20-21 December 1989. The Romanian revolution owed much to Nicolae Ceausescu's lack of good judgment in the final days of his reign which made him allow accidental live television images to be beamed. Ceausescu couldn't anticipate the people's antipathy towards his regime and allowed live broadcast of his rallies and speeches where his authority was openly challenged.⁸

The Romanian Revolution broke out in the southwestern city of Timisoara on 15 December 1989. The agent who would galvanize the nation's discontent and hatred for the Ceausescu regime suddenly appeared in the person of Laszlo Tokes, a young Hungarian pastor in Timisoara. He had been persecuted for months by the Securitate (secret police during Ceausescu regime) for his sermons criticizing the lack of freedom in Romania. When his congregation physically intervened to prevent the government from evicting the popular pastor, hundreds of other Timisoara residents took to the streets on 15 December 1989 to express their solidarity with the congregation. Inspired by the democratic changes that had occurred elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the swelling crowds defied government orders to disperse and began

⁸ Richard A. Hall and Patrick H. O'Neil, "Institutions, Transitions, and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania", in Patrick H. O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1998), p.133.

calling for the end of the Ceausescu regime. These protests were broadcast by *BBC*, *Radio Free Europe*, and *Deutsche Welle*. Moreover, the ongoing political liberalization inside Hungary also led the Hungarian state radio to regularly report on the pastor's fate, which could be heard in parts of Romania. Foreign broadcaster played an important role in giving international publicity to the case of pastor and any informing Romanian people. When the protest demonstration to prevent pastor's eviction evolved into large-scale anti-Ceausescu demonstrations, the Ceausescu regime resorted to brutal force. In the meantime, foreign media were vital in keeping an otherwise blacked out population informed and aware that they were not alone. Foreign media particularly media of West Europe had its own vested interest in broadcasting anti-Ceausescu views and ideas of liberal democracy, as the countries of Western Europe with the support of US wanted to bring down communist governments which existed in the backyard of USSR.⁹

Word of the Timisoara uprising spread to the rest of the country, in large part through foreign radio broadcasts. The Romanian media's role in the overthrow of Ceausescu came into play only on 20 December 1989, and then only accidentally. On 20 December, after returning from a foreign trip, Ceausescu took to television to denounce the "terrorist actions" taking place in Timisoara. Ceausescu's rambling, scarcely coherent tirade was the first indication that something unusual had happened, signaling the regime's growing anxiety.¹⁰

⁹ Nestor Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, (New York: Praeger Pub., 1992), p. 110.

¹⁰ Richard A. Hall and Patrick H. O'Neil, "Institutions, Transitions, and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania", in Patrick H. O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1998), p.133.

The following day, television played a very crucial role when Ceausescu organised a pro-government rally in Bucharest and ordered it to be broadcast live. He addressed the crowd from the balcony of a government building. As he spoke, a few protesting students began unfurling anti-Ceausescu banners and chanting revolutionary slogans. Ceausescu was visibly paled. Dumbfounded by the crowd's rumblings, the aged ruler yielded the microphone to his wife as the television broadcast was interrupted, but the people who watched, saw enough to realize that something was going on. The once unassailable Ceausescu regime suddenly appeared vulnerable. Although anti regime demonstrations had already begun earlier that day in Bucharest and other cities, the crowd started swelling after the telecast. Not even telecasting a tape of the rally later that evening with pro- Ceausescu. Chants dubbed in over the interruption could halt the flow of events.¹¹

On the morning of December 22, Ceausescu again appeared on the balcony of the central committee head quarters and tried to address the crowds milling below. Seeing that the situation was now out of his control and that the army was joining the protesters, Ceausescu and his wife boarded a helicopter and fled the capital, never to return. The pilot of their helicopter landed after faking an engine failure, and the Ceausescus were captured by the armed forces at Cimpulung, about 100 kms. North-West of Bucharest. The desperate fugitives' attempts to bribe their captors failed, and for three days they were hauled about in an armored personnel carrier. Meanwhile, confused battles among various military and securitate factions raged in the streets. Most of the Securitate thought that Ceausescu's was a lost cause, and they abandoned

¹¹ Martyn Rady, *Romania in Turmoil*, (New York: IB Tauris and Co., 1992), pp. 97-99.

their leader. However, a small band of Securitate loyalists referred as 'the terrorists' unleashed a futile but destructive and terrifying counter offensive in support of Ceausescu. Despite being in small number of 1000-2000 nationwide, they relied on psychological warfare as much as actual gunfire. Televisions, which had rapidly rallied to the Revolution after the Ceausescu's flight, were inevitably a primary target of this campaign of psychological warfare.¹² Fighting was especially heavy near the Bucharest television station, which had become the nerve centre of the revolt. The media's grossly exaggerated casualty figures (some reports indicated as many as 70,000 deaths: the actual toll was slightly more than 1,000 killed) convinced people the Romania faced a protracted bloody civil war.¹⁴ On 22 December evening, the main televisions building came under sustained sniper fire from the surrounding buildings. Television commentator Teodor Brates explained, however, that the sniper fire was accompanied by a sophisticated disinformation campaign that had gathered momentum in the hours following Ceausescu's flight. These disinformation campaign was designed to give the impression that the "terrorists" were more numerous and threatening than they in fact were. Hopes were that by making it appear that the tide was turning, officials of the old regime who had defected to the revolution might think twice and return back to the Ceausescu's camp. Initially, televisions personnels fell victim to the disinformation campaign, but later on they made efforts to filter reports arriving at the studio and television building ended up playing a pivotal role in relaying orders and sustaining popular confidence that the revolution would triumph.¹³

¹² Richard A. Hall and Patrick H. O'Neil, "Institutions, Transitions, and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania", in Patrick H. O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1998), p.134.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

Against this ominous backdrop party apparatchiks and army officers who had seized power in the wake of Ceausescu's flight, concluded that the only way to make the Securitate loyalists cease their campaign of terror was to eliminate the object of their struggle. A hastily convened military tribunal tried Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu for "crime against people" and sentenced them to death by firing squad.¹⁴ Television played a crucial role for the next day by broadcasting images of the execution and bullet-ridden bodies of the Ceausescu couple. It resulted in the pressure on Securitate loyalists and most of them surrendered to army units, and street fighting ended.

Thus, it is evident from above description that media played a major role in the Romanian revolution of 1989. In the beginning foreign broadcasters played major role but in the final phase, Romanian televisions greatly contributed to the cause of revolution. Foreign broadcasters broadcast anti-Ceausescu views and eulogized liberal democracy and free market economy. The liberal governments of the countries of West Europe wanted to bring down the communist governments in their neighborhood. Therefore they had their own interest in propagating anti-Ceausescu views. It was through television and radio broadcast that people could know about growing disenchantment with Ceausescu regime among people. They could see and listen to the anti-Ceausescu demonstrations which were taking place in various cities of Romania. They could also get to know about the anti-communist movements which were going on in neighboring countries like Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary etc. So, the role of media in the overthrow of Ceausescu regime can't be underestimated.

¹⁴ Romanian Revolution of 1989, 'www.absoluteasroomomy.com/encyclopedia/R/RO/Romanian Revolution of 1989.html.48k.

Post-Ceausescu Democratic Election

In the tumultuous hours following the Ceausescu's flight from Bucharest, the power vacuum was filled by one Ion Iliescu, a former Central committee secretary and deputy member of the Political Executive Committee who had fallen into disfavour with Ceausescu. Iliescu, took charge of organizing a provisional ruling group, which called itself the National Salvation Front (NSF).

As the fighting subsided after Ceausescu's death, the NSF proceeded to garner public support through several astute policy decisions. Food exports were suspended, and warehouses of prime meals and other foodstuffs were opened to the public. Ceausescu's energy restrictions on house holds were lifted; where as wasteful industrial users were subjected to mandatory conservation. Abortions were legalized and the feared Securitate was placed under military control.¹⁵

Despite the early popular decisions taken by the NSF in mid-January, thousands of protesters again took to the streets of Bucharest, demanding that Securitate criminals and Ceausescu's associates be brought to justice. President Iliescu and his designated Prime Minister, Petre Roman, placated the crowds with the promise (subsequently revoked) that the Community Party of Romania (PCR) would be outlawed. To defuse charges that the NSF had "stolen the revolution from the people, a provisional council of national unity was formed, ostensibly to give voice to a broader spectrum of political views. The Council pledged that free and fair elections would be held in April (subsequently postponed until May) and that the NSF would

¹⁵ Almost Free, 1989-90, www.country_studies.com/Romania/almost_free.1989-90.html_49k.

not participate. By late January, however, the NSF announced that it would form a party and would field its candidates.¹⁶

During the following weeks, the NSF consolidated its control of the political infrastructure it had inherited largely intact from the deposed regime. Supported by the entrenched apparatchiks in the media, the postal service, municipal administration, police departments, the NSF was assured of a landslide victory.

In the election held in spring of 1990, more than eighty political parties competed. The NSF-dominated media accorded these parties limited coverage. The other parties, which had been banned for some four decades lacked the resources and political savvy to wage effective campaigns. These parties especially the important parties like National Peasant Party, the National Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party, failed to harness the public frustration manifested in frequent spontaneous anti-NSF rallies, some of which involved tens of thousands of disgruntled citizens. The NSF ensured that the opposition parties would not be able to deliver their message to the voters. Opposition candidates were prevented from campaigning in the workplace, the postal system intercepted opposition literature, and NSF propagandists in the media grossly misrepresented the platforms and personal backgrounds of opposition candidates.¹⁷

The May elections gave the NSF a resounding victory. President Iliescu won more than 85 percent of the popular vote. NSF candidates for the new bicameral legislature won 92 of 199 seats in the Senate and 263 of 396 seats in the Assembly of Deputies. International Observers generally agreed that despite some tampering and

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

intimidation by the NSF, the outcome of the elections reflected the majority will. To win the election NSF tried hard to submerge its communist roots. It extolled Romanian nationhood and Romanian Orthodox Church. Media helped NSF in its all these campaigns. Party apparatchiks still dominant in the media helped in the creation of personality cult of Iliescu. Apart from all such manipulations he did have support of the people as without it, he would not have secured 85% of popular votes. Election results clearly showed that people still had faith in communist (reform) leaders.

Media Laws in Romania

After the establishment of liberal democracy, there was a need for media laws and regulatory bodies to oversee the media functioning. Regulatory bodies are developed to ensure the independent working of media, which is a necessary condition of democracy. Since 1990, there has been an ongoing debate over the possibility of adopting a comprehensive media law in Romania. Upto 1999, the parliament had not backed one, although there have been several projects. The journalists themselves are most opposed to such a law arguing that it would only limit the freedom of the press and the public's right to information. However, there are other laws that affect the media.

Laws Related to Audio-Visual Media

The audiovisual field is regulated by the Audiovisual Law adopted in 1992, with the National Broadcasting (or Audiovisual) Council established in 1990 as the sole supervisor of the Romanian TV and radio stations. The NBC has 11 members appointed by the Parliament, the Government and the President. It issues and withdraws broadcasting licenses, prepares rules and regulations and monitors the

stations to see if the rules are respected. The functioning of the Romanian public television and radio is also regulated by the law concerning the establishment and functioning of the Romanian Radio Society and of the Romanian Television Society (1994). The public television is financed from a tax called mandatory radio and television subscription as well as funds from the centralized budget, and it also capitalizes on advertised incomes.¹⁸

Press Laws

There is no law directly related to press in Romania. In democracies, the impetus for a press law comes from the journalists themselves, who feel that they need to have their new found freedom defined in law. Such is the case in Romania, where the government is resisting the introduction of such a law. The Romanian minister of justice stated that the danger in such a law would be that journalists would use it to violate other rights, such as the right to privacy, by using freedom of the press as a pretext.

Penal Codes

There are penal codes in Romania which indirectly influence the media activities. There is an Article 205 of the penal code which carries a possible two-year imprisonment for the crime of insult. This and the crime of defamation (Article 206), which can result in upto three years in prison, are regularly used against journalists. For example, in July 1996, two journalists from the *Telegraf* newspaper from the Black Sea port of Constanta were found guilty of insult and sentenced to seven months

¹⁸ Alex Ulmanu, "Media in Romania", www.ejc.nl/jr/em/and/romania.html/46k

imprisonment. In addition they were fined and banned from working as journalists for one year. Their alleged crime was to have accused two local officials of corruption, which was deemed to be insulting even though a local inquiry had found that the officials had indeed been involved in malpractices. The journalists immediately filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which resulted in the general prosecutor suspending the jail sentences. They were later pardoned by President Iliescu, in parts perhaps because of the international pressure that had resulted from the case.¹⁹

Thus, it can be argued that for independent working of media, several mechanisms have been developed in Romania. But the loopholes in the rules of these regulatory bodies are exploited by government of the day to nominate their men into these bodies. Besides, there are some outdated penal codes which are used occasionally against journalists who speak against corruption in the government offices. So these penal codes should be changed according to democratic norms and regulatory bodies should be kept away from political manipulations and given greater autonomy.

Post-Communist Media

During the last years of Ceausescu's regime, the television had only one channel broadcasting only for couple of hours each day, the press was totally under the control of communist party. In general, the audience rate was very low for television.

¹⁹ Helen Darlishire, 'The Media in Transition in Southern Central Europe', in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and Southeastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure since 1989*, (London : Praeger Pub. 2000),p.66.

After the end of Ceausescu regime, the most obvious sign of the changing times was the freedom of the press. The public television was broadcasting all the time, and the public was watching it with equal intensity. Now there are several media outlets. People have variety of sources for information. In the beginning of 1990s there was spectacular growth in the newspapers and periodicals. The number of newspapers grew rapidly and in a matter of months, literally hundreds of newspapers appeared throughout the country. In 1991 there were 1,500 press titles in Romania while in 1989 there were only 500.²⁰ The same took place in radio and television sector.

The best sold national daily is *Libertatea*, a tabloid owned by the Swiss media group *Axel Springer*, which sells on average over 200,000 copies per day. *Adevarul*, which during communism was the largest newspaper under the name of *Scinteia* (The Flame), had build a reputation as a quality newspaper and remains among the best sold dailies with 100,000-120,000 copies a day. Other important dailies of general interest are *Romanian Libera*, *National* and *Ziua*, printing 30,000-70,000 copies each.²¹ Other newspapers, such as *Curierul National*, *Cronica Romana*, *Cotidianul* or *Realitatra Romaneasca* have smaller circulation.

One could hardly separate Romanian dailies into popular (tabloid) and quality newspapers. Although there are some clear examples of tabloid press (*Libertatea*, *Ziarul*, *Atac*), most newspapers are still hybrid between serious, quality information and sensationalist material. *Ziarul Financier* (a business newspaper), which has a niche audience formed of people who need information rather than entertainment is

²⁰ Marcin Frybes, "The Transformation of the Media in Post-Communist Central Europe", in Hall Gardner (ed), *Central and Southeastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure since 1989*, (London: Praeger Pub.,2000),p.55.

²¹ Alex Ulmanu, "Media in Romania", www.ejc.n1/jr/em/and/romania.html1/46k

the most clear-cut example of quality press. The number of national weeklies has decreased since the early 1990s. Political dailies and information weeklies have disappeared or have turned into entertainment magazines. Among the few that remained are the Satirical *Academia Catavencu* (weekly circulation 50-70,000 copies), actually a very influential magazine focused on political and social news and commentary with a humorous twist, the *Axel Springer* owned business weekly *capital* (with a circulation of around 50-60,000 copies).

During communism, the regime had closed one of the two existing public TV channels and had reduced the national broadcasting to firstly two and later three hours every week-day. At present, public television broadcasts through two mainland channels-*TVR1*, a general interest channel any *TVR2* which focuses on cultural and educative programmes, and two international satellite channels-*TVR International* and *TVR cultural*.²²

There are several important private competitors of the public television at national level, the most important being *Pro TV*, *Antena 1* and *Prima TV*. The first two have more viewers in the cities than the public television. Other stations broadcasting nationally via satellite are, *Acasa TV*, *Pro Cinema*, *Atomic TV* (music station), *OTV* and *Realitatea TV*, the first all news channel. There are also over 100 local private TV stations functioning in Romania.

The public radio has four channels (News, Culture, Youth and Music), an international channel and ten local or regional channels broadcasting their own programmes. The first private radio stations appeared in 1990 in Bucharest. They were

²² Mass media: Romania table of contents, "www.country.studies.us/romania/73html.14k

FM stations broadcasting mainly music and hourly news bulletins. At present there are over 150 private local FM stations. The most important networks are established by Radio *Contact* (re-branded into *Kiss*), Radio *PRO* FM and Radio *Unip!us* (re-branded into *Star* FM). FM stations are usually music stations with short news bulletins and few other shows. In 1999, the first license was issued for a national FM private station. The tender was won by Europe Development International, a member of the *Lagar-dere* group, which in May 2000 established *Europa* FM, broadcasting news and music all across Romania through a comprehensive network of FM frequencies.²³ Thus, it can be derived from the above description after the abolition of censorship, how there exists diversity and pluralism in media sector. Public and private media both exists side by side.

Privatization

After the overthrow of Ceausescu regime, liberal democracy was established in Romania. In the economy, market mechanism was introduced. In the media sector also privatization and liberalization was introduced.

Foreign investors played a central role in the process of privatization of media in the Central and Eastern Europe. This was quite natural because at the beginning of the transition period, there were no national capital funds and no big entrepreneurs in Romania. But in Romania, the involvement of foreign investors appears to have been limited. The principal reason was the great instability of the political situation and the continuing influence of post-communist groups. It must be noted that some national media groups have emerged on the scene. Most of these had a "communist" origin

²³ Alex Ulmanu, "Media in Romania", www.ejc.n1/jr/em/and/romania.html/46k

and there are evident links between these new media groups and political parties (especially those political parties that are a natural continuation of the old communist parties). In Romania the principal post-communist media-groups are *Barricada*, *GIP*, *Topaz* and *Express*.²⁴ Among the foreign media groups which have invested in Romania, *Axel Springer* group and Central European Media enterprises groups are important. The first group is from Switzerland and the later one is from US.

The introduction of market economy has changed the media environment. It sharply contrasts with the situation of media during communist period. Now the tabloid journalism is on the rise. The market of gossip, entertainment and life style magazines are growing at the expense of serious publications. Many serious publications have perished due to severe competition with above mentioned kind of publications. With the growth of consumerist culture under the influence of market economy people are more interested in entertainment. This, in no way, will strengthen democracy. For growth of democratic media these serious and quality publications should be preserved.

Media Freedom in Post-Communist Romania

The independence of media is a necessary condition for democracy. Both feed on each other. Without free media we can not imagine the development of a healthy democratic environment. The free media is defined as a medium which allows circulation of a variety of ideas and opinions; it is not an agent of a single view or the state propaganda.

²⁴ Marcin Frybes, "The Transformation of the Media in Post-Communist Central Europe", in Hall Garner (ed.), *Central and Southeastern European Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure since 1989*, (London: Praeger Pub. 2000), p.57.

During communist period media was used by the communist party of Romania to further the cause of socialism. It was used to propagate the achievements of socialist Romania, among masses. However, during Ceausescu period media was used to strengthen his position. After the end of the Ceausescu regime, liberal democracy was established in Romania.

After the establishment of democracy, the relationship between the government and the media developed in a significant way, demonstrated, first of all, through lack of control from state agencies. But this ended very soon. Denial of public replies to allegations of distorted reports of various news, incorrect and/or biased comments on the opposition were used to enhance the influence of the established political power. Nevertheless, the existence of privately owned media limited the amount of damage. But some cases show that even the private media seem to occasionally have a political biased discourse, probably because the owners have specific sympathies.

On September 28, 1999, Romania was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg and ordered to pay compensation for limiting the right to freedom of speech of the former director of the local weekly *Cronica Romacana*, Lonel Dalban. International Press Institute (IPI) welcomed the fact that the European Court of Human Rights held unanimously that Romania had violated Article 10 (Freedom of Expression) of the European Convention of Human Rights when it found Dalban guilty of criminal libel. In September 1992, Dalban published an article in his magazine about a series of frauds allegedly committed by the Chief Executive of a state-owned agricultural company. Dalban's story, which was based on Fraud Squad

reports, also cast suspicion on a senator. The European Court noted in its judgment that the articles “concerned a matter of public interests and the interest of a democratic society could best be served by enabling the press to exercise its essential role of “public watchdog”.²⁵

A journalist from Craiova, Nicolae Andrei, was arrested briefly in February 1994 and prosecuted for having published two allegedly allegorical stories that were considered insulting to President Ion Iliescu-something that also highlighted the undemocratic provisions of the post-Ceausescu penal code, which has already been discussed above.²⁶

On 12 August 1999, Tiberiu Patru, editor-in-chief of the daily *Ora*, was arrested on the charges of bribery. The fact that *Ora* had been involved in exposing local corruption, gives local journalists reason to believe that Patru's persecution is not based on evidence of a crime but is rather an attempt to silence his newspaper.²⁷

These are the some examples which show how post – Ceausescu regime is also trying to interfere into the independent working of media.

A new trend can be seen in the post Ceausescu era, which is the increasing tendency of political and economic circles to exert control upon Romanian media in order to ensure political influence and popularity among electorates. It is mostly the local media that face such problems as attempts to influence central media are subtle. Independent observers such as Centre for independent journalism and international

²⁵ Dana Cotara, "1999 World Press Freedom Review", www.freemedia.at/wpfr/Eu_ropo?romania_html.101/k.

²⁶ Richard A. Hall & Patrick H. O'Neil, "Institutions, Transitions and the Media: A comparison of Hungary and Romania" in Patrick H.O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub. 1998), pp. 142.

²⁷ Dana Cotara, "1999 World Press Freedom Review", www.freemedia.at/wpfr/Eu_ropo?romania_html.101/k.

organizations such as Freedom house and EU have drawn attention to the fact that government intervention has grown in Romanian media through various measures. According to the 1999 survey of Freedom House, Romania lags behind Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary etc in term of media freedom.²⁸

Main Radio and Television stations have been criticized for their obedient attitude towards the government of the day. The largest private TV network, *Pro TV*, benefited from a rescheduling of its outstanding debts to the state budget matched with the lack of criticism towards the government.

According to a report on media ownership written by journalist Manuela Preoteasa, the third largest private television broadcaster, *Prima TV* has been subsidized by the government through a complicated scheme, which also influenced the media reporting in favour of the government. Radio station *Europa FM*, owned by French group, *Lagardere*, has also come under criticism after three of its best known journalists quit in protest to management intervention altering news coverage on the Prime Minister. The stations top management explained *Lagerdere* had interests in other Romanian industries, which could have been harmed by critical coverage of government's policies. The public radio and televisions stations have also been constantly criticized for their bias in favour of the government. Journalists working for the public radio have openly accused Dragos Seuleanu, the head of the institution, for shaping the radio newscasts to serve the ruling party.²⁹

It can be seen from above analysis of some events that even in the post-communist period media is facing the pressure of economic and political interests

²⁸ Alex Ulmanu, "Media in Romania", www.ejc.nl/jr/em/and/romania.html/46k.

²⁹ Ibid.

which need to be checked by developing proper mechanism. Freedom House, a New York based organization, publishes every year the survey of situation of media independence in all the countries. Table3.2 shows the ratings given to Romania by Freedom House.

Table 3. 2: Freedom House Survey of Media Freedom in Romania (1994-2002)

Year	Score	Average score
1994	55	45.2
1995	50	
1996	49	
1997	47	
1998	39	
1999	44	
2000	44	
2001	44	
2002	35	

The higher the score, the intense the pressure on media

Score: (0-30-free), (31-60· partly free), (61-100- not free)

Source:www.freedomhouse.org/research/ratings.XLS

Freedom House has given Romania a very poor rating. From the above table it can be seen that the Romanian media is only partly free. Though the ratings indicate that the media can be categorized as partly free, in the years 1994 and 1995 it veered towards the 'not free' zone. However, the 2002 ratings show a marked improvement in creating better environment for media functioning.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be derived from above analysis in this chapter that media in Romania has passed through different phases. During communist period media was under the supervision of Romanian Communist Party. No other alternative

(bourgeoisie) media was allowed to develop for the fear that they would spread bourgeoisie ideas and undermine the socialist cause. In late 1980s, media especially electronic media helped in the democratic revolution as it broadcast the ideas of democracy and the changes which were taking place in other parts of the region. After the democratic revolution and coming up of democratic regime to power, there were expectation that media-control would be a thing of past. But such expectations remained by and large unfulfilled. New democratic regimes devised new sophisticated ways and means to influence the independent working of media.

CHAPTER 4

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN HUNGARY AND ROMANIA

Introduction

The democratic revolutions of 1989 led to the establishment of liberal democratic regimes in both Hungary and Romania. In one stroke one party rule of respective communist parties in Hungary and Romania was abolished. The control of party apparatus over media is now a thing of the past. In the post-communist period in both the countries, a real diversity and pluralism in the field of mass media exists. This is the most important difference between the communist era and the contemporary period. Despite outward similarities there was an enormous difference in the roles and functions of the mass media in both the countries during communism and even post communism.

This chapter tries to analyze the role of media in Hungary and Romania in comparative perspective. It tries to find out the significant differences in the situation of media in both the countries during communist period as well as in the post-communist period.

Media in Hungary and Romania during Communist Period

As it has already been discussed in previous chapters that media in Hungary and Romania during communist period worked under the direct supervision of communist parties of both the countries. The media acted as an extension of the party apparatus. It functioned as a "transmission belt" that communicated the will of the

party to the masses. It worked as a medium of interaction between the party and the masses. One major contribution of the communist regimes was that they created a mass reading and viewing public that had not existed before. Nearly everyone read newspapers, and as televisions spread across the region in the 1950s and 1960s, its reach was universal. The use of media by the communist party was to further the socialist causes which was further facilitated by jamming foreign radio and television broadcasts, mainly from western Europe, which eulogized western bourgeoisie liberalism and capitalist market economy. But the jamming of foreign broadcast was not possible in every area of both the countries.

Despite these similarities, the situation of media in both countries were not quite the same.

In the case of Hungary it can be said that it had one of the most open media system under communist rule after Poland in Eastern Europe. Although the press and broadcasting were subject to various controls, many topics that were taboo elsewhere were vigorously reported and discussed in the Hungarian media. A real diversity of official media existed well before 1989 in Hungary and not all the official media was directly under the control of Hungarian communist party. The press was fairly independent in Hungary. As described in the second chapter the intellectual monthlies like *Alfold* or *Mozgovilag* possessed a certain margin of autonomy. This limited media independence was the result of the pressure of democratic forces within society. After the failed 1956 revolution, Hungarian journalists were welcome to write about a wide range of topics, with only a few subjects off-limits, including the 1956 revolution. This limited freedom was given by Janos Kadar, the communist party chief

of Hungary. He argued that to win back the support of the populace, "Goulash (liberal) Communism" was necessary, based on the slogan "He who is not against us, is with us".¹ This limited media independence created confusion among journalists. Sometimes they started speaking their mind and writing against officials abuses. This resulted in governmental action against them. Thus, a kind of hide and seek continued between journalists and the state.

In the case of Romania, Richard A Hall and Patrick O'Neil has said that if Hungary possessed Eastern Europe's most open media, Romania surely possessed its most restricted one.²

In Romania, the media role varied according to the changing style and politics of the party leaderships. Unlike Hungary, where the presence of strong democratic forces within society compelled the communist leadership for allowing limited media independence, Romanian media was very much controlled. No independent publications were allowed to exist. After returning back from China in 1971, Ceausescu further consolidated the authority of party over media. Many changes were made in the party structures which used to oversee media regulations. The former state committee for culture of art, was reconstituted as the "Council of Socialist Culture and Education" which was answerable to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In 1985, a joint party-state organisation, the "National Council for Science and Education" was formed under the chairmanship of Elena Ceausescu, the wife of

¹ Owen V. Johnson, "The Media and Democracy in Eastern Europe", in Patrick O'Neil (ed), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Rienner Pub. 1998),p.110.

² Richard A Hall & Patrick, O' Neil, "Institutions, Transitions and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania" in Patrick O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Rienner Pub. 1998),p.129.

Ceausescu. Its function was to ensure uniform policy implementation in science, technology, and education. It provided the communist party another mechanism to oversee educational activities. The propaganda and media section of the central committee exercised general guidance and supervision of all publications and dissemination procedures.³

Thus, by the 1980s, Romania was a "media black hole" with a press whose main task was to propagate the ideology of socialism and prevent the spread of bourgeoisie values and culture. It meant secret police involvement, the closure of overseas news bureau, and extreme limits on travel. Severe restrictions on energy consumption drastically reduced television broadcast time to only a couple of hours each evening.⁴ During Ceausescu's rule (1965-1989), the secret police (Securitate) had become very influential and used to meddle into activities of state apparatus. They had their men in media who used to influence the contents.

Thus, above analysis shows how there were differences in media environment of both the countries during communist rule. Although, in both the countries, media worked under the supervision of respective communist parties but media in Hungary was relatively free than Romanian media.

Media and Democratic revolution of 1989 in Hungary and Romania

In the previous chapter it has been already discussed how media played a major role in the democratic transition in 1989. Both domestic as well as foreign

³ Mass Media: Romania Table of Contents, www.CountryStudiesUS/Romania/73.html.luk.

⁴ Dan Gonescu, "Tele-Revolution to Tale Evolution in Romania", *Transition*, vol.2 no.8, 19 April 1996,p.42.

media made their respective contribution in the making of 1989 revolution in both the countries.

But the impact of media on democratic movements varied widely from country to country, as did the role of international and domestic media. Here one more thing should not be forgotten that the duration and form of transition process shaped the role of media in both Hungary and Romania. These characteristics also influenced which type of media (broadcast or print) would play the more critical role in the democratic transition. The slow, deliberate, peaceful implosion of communist rule and the diversification of the media in Hungary contrasted sharply with the quick and violent overthrow of Ceausescu personal dictatorship which was described by many commentators as "the first televised revolution in history" occurring both at and through television.⁵

As, discussed above, unlike Romania, media in Hungary was given little independence before the democratic transition. This limited independence of media helped the democratic groups in propagating their ideas and expanding their mass base. By 1987, an opposition had been established and underground publications proliferated in Hungary. The official press organ of the Hungarian patriotic forum, *Magyar Nemzet* became the mouthpiece of the liberal opposition by the end of 1980s, and democratic movements' supporter intellectuals published their articles in it. Many dailies which were linked to state began to distance themselves from party line as they had anticipated the change of power structure and erosion of support base of

⁵ Richard A.Hall & Patrick HO Neil, "Institutions, Transitions and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania", in Patrick H O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub. 1998), p.130.

communist party. Many regional and national publications even removed the usual exhortation "proletariat of the world unite!" from their masthead. It was only *Nepzabadsag*, the central organ of the communist party, which stuck to the party line.⁶ Even some hardcore party leaders started taking reformist view. For instance, in early 1989, a politbureau member of the communist party, Imre Pozsgay in a radio show rejected the party's version of 1956 uprising as "Counter revolution" and called it instead a "popular uprising".⁷

In the case of Romania, the contrary was true. In Romania, there was absence of even a brief period of liberalisation prior to December 1989. Whatever role the domestic media played in the democratic revolution of 1989, it was because of sheer luck. Nicolae Ceausescu couldn't anticipate the growing anti-Ceausescu feeling among masses. So, in the final days of his rule, he allowed to broadcast live television images of his rallies and speeches. Through live telecast people could see the demonstrators mouthing anti-Ceausescu slogans in front of Ceausescu.⁸ They even saw the flight of Ceausescu by a helicopter. This encouraged the masses who decided to go against the Ceausescu regime.

Along with domestic media, foreign media had also played major role in the revolutions in both the countries.

In the case of Hungary, the broadcasts of *Radio Free Europe*, *Deutsche Welle*, *BBC* and other international services broadcast several anti-communist regime

⁶ Ibid, p.131.

⁷ Le Edwards, *Media Politik: How the Media transforms the World Politics*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub. 2001), p.124.

⁸ Richard A.Hall & Patrick HO Neil, "Institutions, Transitions and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania", in Patrick H O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub. 1998),p.133.

demonstrations. As discussed in the second chapter, three media events which contributed immensely in the collapse of communist government in Hungary, were broadcast through domestic media as well as international channels. It is true that Western Europe had its own vested interest in the collapse of communism but the broadcasting services of the countries of Western Europe broadcast what the people of Hungary were being denied. The communist mass media also had to compete with the widespread use of videocassettes recorders and through them dissemination of democratic ideas and dissident voices. One 1988 estimate placed the number of VCRs at 300,000 in Hungary.⁹

In the Romanian revolution also foreign media played a catalytic role. Given the closed nature of Ceausescu regime and absence of limited media independence prior to December 1989, it was inevitable that foreign broadcast media would play an important role. During the initial stages of anti-Ceausescu movements, it was the *BBC*, *Radio-Free Europe*, *Voice of America*, and other western media through which the Romanian citizens learned about the popular movements for liberal democracy in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and other countries and were inspired to move against Ceausescu.¹⁰

Thus, it can be seen from above analysis how media was instrumental in the democratic revolutions in Hungary and Romania. The impact of domestic media in Hungary was much more than in Romania. It was due to limited liberalization prior to 1989 that led to emergence of some independent media outlets which supported democratic groups. Romania lacked this kind of liberalisation prior to 1989. In terms

⁹ Le Edwards, *Media Politik: How the Media transforms the World Politics*, (London: Lynne Rienner Pub. 2001), p.124.

¹⁰ *Ibid*,p.135.

of foreign media impact both countries were getting broadcasts of international broadcasting services like *BBC*, *Radio Free Europe*, *Voice of America* etc. and these services influenced the public opinion massively in favour of liberal democracy.

Post-Revolution Democratic Elections in Hungary and Romania

After the democratic revolutions which took place in both the countries in 1989, both countries went for democratic elections as the main aim of the democratic movements was to establish democratic regimes. In these elections also the role of media was very important.

In both the countries the ex-communist who had turned reformers tried to manipulate the media in their favour. In the case of Hungary, reform communist Imre Pozsgay who belonged to Hungarian Socialist Party, which was earlier named as Hungarian Communist Party, tried every trick to manipulate government television but their activities only exposed their false commitment to competitive politics and fuelled a more anti-communist wave among the masses. In the meanwhile there was a scandal which was named as "Duna-gate". A Hungarian secret police officer revealed that the police continued to spy on members of the opposition parties. With the help of the officer, a television news crew, practicing a kind of investigative journalism, entered police headquarters in Budapest and filmed the secret files related to political activities of opposition parties. This led to negative publicity to leaders of Hungarian Socialist Party.¹¹

These all activities worked against communist candidates in the election. Besides, the three events (discussed in the second chapter) enabled the opposition to

¹¹ ibid

carry its message into the homes of the Hungarian people through television images and present itself as a political alternative to the reform communist. Without the mass media, there would not have been peaceful transition in Hungary

Contrary to Hungary, in Romania the reformed communists won the election held after the execution of Ceausescu. In Romania, after the flight of Ceausescu, Ion Iliescu took charge of organizing a provisional ruling group called National Salvation Front (NSF). Iliescu was a former Central Committee member of the communist party and was not in good terms with Ceausescu. In the election, this reformist communist group NSF under the leadership of Ion Iliescu participated. It had the control of the political infrastructure which it had inherited from the erstwhile Ceausescu regime. This group (NSF) was supported by the entrenched apparatchiks in the media during election. The NSF dominated media gave other parties limited coverage. NSF ensured that the opposition parties would not be able to deliver their message to the voters through media.¹² This helped the winning chances of NSF. This group (NSF) got more than 85% of votes. However, despite these accusations it can be said that such landslide victory was not the result of only media manipulation. People had faith in leadership of Iliescu.

Thus, it can be seen how media played a major role in the democratic elections. Ruling elites left no stone unturned in manipulating the media for their own benefit. But the people cannot be fooled for a long time. They understand what is wrong and what is right. Despite media manipulation as in the case of Hungary, they gave resounding victory to Democratic Party called MDF and allies. In Romania, the

¹² Almost Free, 1989-90, "www.country_Studies.com/romania/almost_free, 1989...90.html.49k

reform communists were given the mandate to rule despite accusations of media manipulation as people had faith in the leadership of Iliescu.

Media as a Battle Ground

After the democratic elections held in early period of 1990, two different sets of parties came to power in Hungary and Romania. Whereas in Hungary, democratic party, called MDF with allies won the election, reform communists won the election in Romania. After coming to power, both these parties started to consolidate their position in media. To strengthen their position they often tried to silence the publications associated with the opposite viewpoints either through crackdown or through appointing their own men in governing bodies.

In the case of Hungary, it has already been discussed, how the government tried to silence the newspapers which were critical of their policies. The new government branded these newspapers as product of "crypto-communist" press.¹³ The government privatized these kinds of publications and sold them off either to international investors or domestic investors. The government even created some new pro-government publications which were owned by the industries that were themselves under state ownership. Many newspapers were closely identified with the ruling regime. For example, the Hungarian daily *Magyar Forum* was linked with the party of Prime Minister Jozef Antall.¹⁴

¹³ Richard A.Hall & Patrick HO Neil, "Institutions, Transitions and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania", in Patrick H O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub. 1998), p.136.

¹⁴ Marcin Frybes, "The Transformation of the Media in Post-Communist Central Europe in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and South Eastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure Since 1989*, (London: Praeger Pub. 2000), p.55.

The government of Jozef Antall also tried to manipulate the electronic media. As discussed in the second chapter, Antall government tried to appoint their own men in regulating body of radio and television hoping to reshape media content from within. This was resisted by the heads of the Hungarian Television and Radio, Elemer Hankiss and Csaba Gombar. Finally, they resigned under the pressure of ruling government.¹⁵

The same was taking place in Romania. After coming to power, Iliescu regime started showing its intolerance and became suspicious of criticism and opposition and started using the state machinery to block the development of independent media. The NSF realised the importance of television in the wake of December 1989 events and moved to ensure that Romanian television was strictly subordinated to its political interests. It was because of these government interventions that there was rapid growth of a press that was bitterly critical of Ion Iliescu's regime. *Romania Libera*, a daily, which was pro-communist and had helped in creation of Ceausescu's personality cult, became torchbearer of anti- Iliescu media. Along with *Romania Libera*, several influential weeklies such as *Express*, *Zigzag*, *Tinerama* and later dailies such as *Environmental Zilei* and *Ziua* also took anti Iliescu stance.¹⁶

Like Hungary, many incidents took place in Romania in which journalists who had tried to expose official abuses were put behind bars on the charges of violating penal codes which have been discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁵ Andrew K. Milton, "Bound but Not Gagged: Media Reform in Democratic Transitions", *Comparative Political Studies*, 34 (5), June, 2001, pp.513-14.

¹⁶ Richard A.Hall & Patrick HO Neil, "Institutions, Transitions and the Media: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania", in Patrick H O'Neil (ed.), *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*, (London: Lynne Reinner Pub. 1998),p.140-41.

Thus, it can be said that democratic regimes which came to power in both Hungary and Romania, did not help in creating a free media environment. Instead they tried to influence the independent working of media. But one silver lining was there that, in spite of, occasional crack downs on independent journalists, at least, some institutional mechanisms have been developed in both the countries to safeguard the media independence which can be maintained by vigilant public.

Media Laws in Hungary and Romania

In the previous chapters, the media laws of Hungary and Romania have been discussed at length. Both the countries have borrowed their media laws heavily from European laws.¹⁷

Press Laws

In both the countries, the laws related to media have been passed. In the case of Press laws the governments are not in the haste of passing such a law. Although there are some press laws related to some specific issues, like press subsidies and registration. As in the case of Hungary there is a press law of 1986 which is with some modifications still in force. It deals with fees and registration process of any publication. There are no comprehensive press laws in the both the countries.

Laws Related to Audio -Visual Media

Romanian government passed and adopted its audiovisual law in 1992. Hungary went late in this direction and passed its broadcasting laws in 1995 which was enacted in 1996. In Romania a National Broadcasting Council had already been

¹⁷ Alison Harcourt, "The Regulation of Media Markets in Selected EU Accession States in Central And Eastern Europe" *European Law Journal*, 9(3), July 2003, pp.320-24.

established in 1990 as the sole supervisor of the Romanian TV and Radio stations. The NBC has 11 members who are appointed by the Parliament, the Government and the President. This Council issues and withdraws broadcasting licenses, prepares rules and regulations and monitors the stations to see if the rules are respected. In Romania, in 1994, one another law concerning the establishment and functioning of the Romanian Radio Society and of the Romanian Television Society was adopted which also regulate broadcasting system of the country.¹⁸

In Hungary media laws related to electronic media which were enacted in 1996, does the same kind of job as it mandates that, in broadcasts for the general audience, local broadcasts should constitute at least 20 percent of the total broadcasts time by 1999 and that commercial programmes should not exceed 20 percent of the total. It also says that in public and commercial broadcasting, advertisements should not exceed an average of six minutes per hour. This act has also created a National Radio and Television Board (ORTT) and the Broadcasting Fund. ORTT allocates frequencies and supervises the observation of media law, including the amount of time taken up by advertising, or the appropriateness of the contents of programme. It also has a commission for dealing with complaints from viewers. The members of ORTT are selected from nominees of the Parliamentary parties; its president is jointly nominated by the President and the Prime Minister of Hungary. The Board reports to parliament and its members cannot be called back. The Broadcasting Fund derives its revenues from broadcasting fees paid by broadcasters and channeled them, mostly, to the public service media. The annual budget of the fund is approved by Parliament.

¹⁸ Media In Romania, www.ejc.nl/jr/em/land/romania.html.46k

Every household owning a television set pays a license fee. The annual amount of the fee was determined by a simple majority in parliament within the framework of annual budget.¹⁹

Penal Codes

In both countries there are some penal codes which deal with irresponsible journalism and legal penalties. These penal codes have been used many a times to harass independent journalists who had tried to expose corrupt officials of the government, which have been discussed at length in the previous chapter.

Thus, it can be seen that how both countries have developed some regulatory mechanism to deal with media, especially electronic media. Putting a broadcasting regulation in place is likely to improve the freedom of media in at least three ways. Firstly, it may democratize the supervision of the public service media. Because under the communist regimes, the direct subordination of the state broadcasters to the communist party had been a key media policy instrument allowing for the political control of these institutions, since the top managers and editors were appointed on the basis of ideological position. The broadcasting boards should function as a buffer between the broadcasters and parliament. They are a means to separate the legislative and the executive powers. Although the mechanisms of democratic supervision of the public media vary even in the advanced democracies but they all are backed by the idea that the public nature of the public service media is best guaranteed by a supervisory system representing a variety of actors. The democratization of

¹⁹ Peter Bajmoi. Lazar, "Freedom of the Media in Hungary, 1990-2002, Ph D. Thesis, "http://www.ceu.hu/Pol_Sci/dissertations/Bajmoi_Thesis_edited.doc.p.3.

supervision means the decentralization of control over these institutions, and hence the elimination of one-sided political pressure.

Secondly, broadcasting regulation may improve the funding of the public service media. Financial independence is a precondition for political independence. Democratic broadcasting regulations aim to make the public service media independent of funding controlled by the government, and hence to improve their editorial independence.

Thirdly, broadcasting regulations also regulate the privatization process. How much privatization should be allowed and which media outlet should be given license, these all are regulated by these broadcasting acts.²⁰

In both Hungary and Romania, broadcasting acts have been adopted. This theoretical acceptance of the need for acts and laws to ensure free media environment has had some positive outcome. Thus after the adoption of these acts the meddling of government in the affairs of media has decreased significantly in both the countries.

Post-Communist Media and Privatization

The political changes which took place in 1989 allowed the new democratic governments to abolish censorship and other administrative restrictions. With the end of these restrictions within a few months, the numbers of press titles increased in a spectacular way in both the countries. In Hungary there were 1,800 titles in 1988

²⁰ Ibid,p.6.1.

which grew to 3,000 titles two years later. In Romania, there were 1,500 titles while in 1989 there were only around 500.²¹

The Same phenomenon took place in the case or Radio Stations. In both the countries, before 1989, there were only two or three channels, but after 1989, the total number of news stations grew quickly. The same was taking place in television.

But this euphoria did not last long. New problems concerning the introduction of the market economy became a real problem. The end of public subsidies, the rise of the general costs of newspaper projection, the aggressive competitiveness and most importantly the arrival of foreign media giants, changed the initial situation. To maintain their existence, in the severe competition, the smaller groups needed financial resources, which they lacked, so many of them downed their shutters or were sold off to private domestic or foreign groups. some old intellectual publications either disappeared or adapted themselves to market needs. Hungarian publications faced this problem more as there process of privatization was started in a wild manner. In Romania, due to coming to power of reform communists even after the democratic elections, privatization was started at a slow place.

The benefit of privatization was mainly expropriated by foreign investors in both Hungary and Romania as there were no national capital funds capable of investment. During the transition period foreign groups such as *Bertelsmann* (Germany), *Axel Springer* (Switzerland), *Lagardere* group (France) etc bought the great majority of the press in Hungary. In 1996, foreign investors held a controlling interest in 60 percent of the daily newspaper market. In 1996 it self the radio and

²¹ Marcin Frybes, "The Transformation of the Media in Post-Communist Central Europe in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and South Eastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure Since 1989*, (London: Praeger Pub. 2000),p.55-57.

television-broadcasting act was adopted which provide a minimum level of Hungarian ownership in a company. The two national channels, *TV2* and *TV3*, were merged into *TV2* in February 2000 by Scandinavian Broadcasting system (which in spite of its name is US-owned Company). Magyar Television (*MTV*) is the public service broadcaster but it is in a parlous state. German based media group Bertelsmann has the other main channel *RTL-KLUB*.²²

The concentration of foreign ownership in the national press of Hungary is pronounced and only a minority of the national daily press remains Hungarian-owned or government subsidized. When the newspapers came to the market, there was not enough Hungarian capital or interest in acquiring them, and no Hungarian government proposed restrictions on foreign ownership in the press. As a result, 7 out of 10 national dailies and almost all of the local dailies are owned by western investors.²³

In the case of Romania, the situation is somewhat different. In the initial years after the democratic revolution, the process of privatization did not go at a fast pace. The reason behind it was the political instability and the strong position of communists in the new government.²⁴ The investors were reluctant to invest in Romanian media due to above reason. Contrary to Hungary, where more than 80% of media is privatized, the media in Romania is not privatized on a massive scale. But still many foreign media groups such as *Axel Springer* (Switzerland), *CEMA* (US),

²² The Hungarian Media Landscape, www.ejc.nl/jr/emland/hungary.html

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Marcin Frybes, "The Transformation of the Media in Post-Communist Central Europe in Hall Gardner (ed.), *Central and South Eastern Europe in Transition: Perspectives on Success and Failure since 1989*, (London: Praeger Pub. 2000),p.57.

Lagardere Group (France) are owning several TV channels, Radio Stations and newspapers in Romania.²⁵

There are several private competitors of the public televisions (*TVR1, TVR2*). at national level the most important ones are *Pro TV* (*CEMA* Group of USA), *Antenal TV* and *Prima TV*. The first two have more viewers in the cities than the public television. The big international names such as *HBO, Hallmark, Fox Kids, Discovery and Euro sport* distributed via the cable, have programmes translated into Romanian.²⁶

Thus, what is evident from the above analysis is that introduction of market economy has brought considerable changes in the media environment of both the countries. Although, it has created a variety of information sources but along with it, there has been decline in the standard of content. More emphasis is on entertainment which sells. Serious publication have disappeared from market or adapted themselves to the needs of the market. In market economy whatever sells, is eulogized or encouraged.

Media Freedom

After the revolutions of 1989, both in Hungary and Romania, democratically elected regimes came to power. They abolished the media monopoly and censorship of the communist party and a pluralistic and diverse media came into existence. Privatization took place and private and public media existed side by side. Media laws and regulations were adopted to democratize and decentralize the media management body. These all initiatives were signs of democratic consolidation.

²⁵ Media in Romania, "www.ejc.n1/jn/em/and/romania.html/46k

²⁶ Ibid.

Despite these initiatives the governments in power in both the countries have been accused of media manipulation and crack down on publications with opposite viewpoints. Several cases of harassment of journalists in both the countries, who were speaking their mind, have already been discussed in the previous chapters. Political conflicts culminated around the nomination of the members of the broadcasting councils and the general directors of the public service broadcasters.

But, in spite of all these pressures on the independent working of media in both the countries there is some hope in future. Now there are various sources of information. The government cannot manipulate all the media outlets. If we can rely on the press freedom surveys of the Freedom House (FH), released every year, Romania lags behind Hungary in media freedom. Freedom House surveys take article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a basis for the assessment criteria, and focus on the individual rather than the whole of the media. They are based on 3 criteria, namely:

1. The structure of the news delivery system and its influence on media content
2. Political intervention into the media, including access to information and sources, censorship, the intimidation of Journalists and
3. Economic influence on media, including pressure by government funding, corruption, with-holding in government advertising, bias in licensing and quotas for newsprint, as well as the market competition on the private media.²⁷

Below, in Table 4.1, based on Freedom House annual surveys, the status of media in select countries of Western Europe, East Central Europe, as well as the USA

²⁷ Peter Bajmoi. Lazar, "Freedom of the Media in Hungary, 1990-2002, Ph D. Thesis, "http://www.ceu.hu/Pol_Sci/dissertations/Bajmoi_Thesis_edited.doc.p.3.

and Russia have been given. The higher the score is, the more intense the pressure is on media. The ratings under the subsequent years refer to the date of issue for example 10 under "Norway/1994", refers to the period January 1-December 31, 1993.

Table 4.1: Freedom House Annual Surveys of Press Freedom in Select Countries, 1994-2002

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Average
Norway	10	8	5	5	5	5	5	5	9	6.3
Denmark	11	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9.2
Sweden	11	10	10	10	10	10	11	10	8	10.0
USA	12	12	14	14	12	13	13	15	16	13.4
Germany	11	18	21	11	11	13	13	13	15	14.0
Finland	17	15	15	15	15	15	15	14	10	14.5
Netherlands	14	18	14	14	14	14	14	15	15	14.6
Australia	19	18	12	12	12	12	12	14	24	15.0
Cyprus	30	24	16	18	18	16	16	18	18	19.3
UK	24	22	22	22	21	20	20	17	18	20.6
Czech Rep.	20	21	19	19	19	20	20	24	25	20.7
Estonia	28	25	24	22	20	20	20	20	18	21.8
Lithuania	30	29	25	20	17	18	20	19	19	21.8
Latvia	29	29	21	21	21	21	24	24	19	23.2
Poland	30	29	21	27	25	25	19	19	18	23.6
France	19	27	30	26	26	27	24	21	17	24.1
Italy	25	30	30	27	27	28	27	27	27	27.5
Slovenia	40	37	27	28	27	27	27	21	20	28.2
Hungary	30	38	34	31	28	28	30	28	23	30.0
Bulgaria	43	39	46	44	36	39	30	26	29	33.8
Slovakia	47	55	41	49	47	30	30	26	22	38.5
Romania	55	50	49	47	39	44	44	44	35	45.2
Russia	40	55	58	53	53	59	60	60	60	55.3

The higher the score, the intense the pressure on media

Score: (0-30-free), (31-60- partly free), (61-100- not free)

Source: www.freedomhouse.org/research/ratings.XLS

This table clearly shows that the media is freer in Western Europe than in East Central Europe. However, by late 1990s there is gradual improvement. Most of the countries of East Central Europe (ECC) in the early 1990s got the rating as "partly

free". All the countries except Czech and Russia have shown some improvement over the years although Czech has always remained under the "free" category.

This table also shows that the media is relatively freer in the countries such as Czech, Poland, Hungary etc. which have joined now the European Union. The only exception to this is Slovakia but it has also improved its rating in the early 2000s. It happened because there was pressure from European Union on them. European Union prescribes some criteria to countries which are to join this organization. Media freedom is one of the most important criteria.

In the case of Hungary and Romania, this table clearly exhibits that Hungary is doing well and since 1998 till 2002 its media is under the category of free. While in the case of Romania, there is gradual improvement but it has never come under the category of "free". It always remained under "partly free" category.

Conclusion

Thus, in this chapter it can be seen, the role which media played in both Hungary and Romania. During communist regime it is evident from the above analysis that Hungarian media was freer than Romanian media. The limited freedom of media in Hungary during communist regime helped democratic movements in peaceful transition while quite contrary happened in Romania where the Ceausescu regime was violently overthrown. In the same way it was the limited media freedom in Hungary prior to 1989, which allowed the development of media independence in Hungary in significant way in later years than in Romania.

After the privatization in both Hungary and Romania, it can be said that media has diversified but at the same time even the private players are trying to make close connection with the regime in power to get licenses and advertisements.

Thus, it can be said that for media independence in a true sense, there should be vigilant public which could check the power at the helm of affairs. In both Hungary and Romania, mechanisms to regulate the media have been institutionalized which at least prevent governments from direct intervention.

CONCLUSION

The main thrust of this study has been to examine and analyze the role of media in the context of democratization in Hungary and Romania. This study analyses the situation of media during the communist and post-communist period in both the countries.

It is evident from this study that during communist rule, media was under the control of respective communist parties of both the countries. Media was used to eulogize socialist ideas, values and culture. Foreign broadcasts were jammed which were disseminating the ideas of (bourgeoisie) democracy and market economy. It was done to further the cause of Socialism as it was believed that bourgeoisie ideology and values would corrupt the masses and would become a stumbling block in the development of socialist state. Although, there was freedom of expression guaranteed in the socialist constitutions of both the countries, but it was with a condition that freedom should not be used against the interests of the people and socialism. Theoretically and to some extent empirically it sounds good as after the socialist revolutions in both the countries private ownership was ended and at the economic front, much was done for the masses. It was feared that the vestiges of the erstwhile property owning class would try to overturn the process of socialization of means of production. And, therefore, this condition was added.

The socialist revolution in both Hungary and Romania was not driven by inner forces, as it happened in Russia and China. Socialist Revolution in both these countries took place with the backing of USSR. One could even go far enough to say that revolution was imposed from above. Had revolution taken place with mass uprising from below, perhaps the situation would have been somewhat different. The degeneration took

place in the leadership of both the countries. The situation became worse when people's dictatorships turned to become personal dictatorship and democracy within party was abolished in the name of democratic centralism, as it happened in Romania under Ceausescu.

In the liberal democracy, theoretically at least media is given complete independence. Freedom and the autonomy of media are eulogized. Freedom of media is considered to be the cornerstone of liberal democracy. As a matter of fact, media is called the 'Fourth Estate' of governments. The media freedom provided in the liberal constitutions work as a check on government. In fact, the problem starts when the ruling elites devise ways and means to exploit the fault lines in the liberal democracy and use the media in their favour. The ruling elites try to establish their hegemony by appointing their persons in the media and even try to influence the contents from within and outside, as it can be seen in the case of post-communist Hungary and Romania.

In a liberal democracy in the name of free and fair competition, big media giants (mainly US and West Europe based) try to monopolize the market and small players disappear from the market. They are bought by the big media houses. Thus, in a way, in the name of competition finally, competition is decimated. It has happened in both Hungary and Romania where many foreign-based media houses have acquired several small groups. For instance in Hungary, *Axel Springer* alone which is a Switzerland based media MNC, controls two third of the news paper market of Hungary.

A flaw of the media in a market economy is that in a competitive market economy serious and intellectual publications perish or adapt themselves to the needs of readers (turned consumers). In a market economy consumerist culture is eulogized, which leads

to an emphasis on entertainment, gossip, and lifestyle of celebrities. So, a demand is created for magazines and channels, which deal with these subjects. So, publications with serious issues are unable to compete with them. Further, the media groups which have special sympathy with particular ruling elites due to commercial considerations, try to avoid exposing their abuses in official capacity.

Through advertisements media have turned viewers, readers and listeners into consumers. Serious news is avoided and sensationalism is created to sell. For instance, very recently, in India, news of a tape of Salman Khan-Aishwarya Rai conversation was splashed in the newspapers, channels etc. In fact, this tape was lying with police for two or three years, but has been brought before the public now. Why is it so? Because a renowned newspaper group of India was to launch its Mumbai edition. So, for its first edition it wanted to have something sensational. So, they managed to get the tape somehow and published it. Now, the circulation of this newspaper has grown by leaps and bounds in Mumbai. In a market economy, whatever sells, works and sensation sells like hot cake. Page-3 journalism which is in vogue now, is the typical face of free market media, where poverty, hunger, unemployment and gloomy faces are covered up and so called hip, happening and decent crowds are projected as the real face of society.

Thus, it can be seen by and large that state controlled media can be manipulated to serve the government while privately owned media fosters and strengthens business interests. Hungary and Romania both are passing through this dilemma.

During communist period when the degeneration in leadership took place and economic situation worsened, people wanted to express their anger but media was not within their reach. The communist leadership did not allow for this freedom. So, the

people started looking towards foreign broadcast, especially from Western Europe. Foreign broadcasts, like *Radio Free Europe*, *Deutsche Well*, *BBC* etc, and videotapes contributed immensely in this. West European media backed by US had its own vested interest in broadcasting anti-communist and pro-liberal democracy ideas as the governments of West European countries with the help of US wanted to bring down the communist regimes in their neighborhood. Besides this, they also had their interest in creating a new market for their expansion as socialism had not allowed private media.

People also expressed their antipathy through domestic media. In Hungary, domestic media's role was more explicit as the Kadar government had started practicing Goulash (Liberal) communism and allowed limited media independence. So, several publications, especially *Samizdat* publications supported the democratic groups. This limited media freedom helped domestic groups to spread their ideas and expand their mass base. However, government occasionally tried to silence them but after this limited freedom, there was no looking back. But in the case of Romania, foreign broadcasts played minimal role as there was not even limited media freedom before revolution.

After the establishment of liberal democracy, it was hoped that now media would be out of the control of the state and free media environment would be created. But these hopes were belied by the government in both countries. After coming to power, the governments started meddling into the independent working of media. Although, regulatory mechanisms for media autonomy, were developed but these regulatory bodies were not given full autonomy. Some argue that this is a persistence of the communist political culture in post-communist countries. But, this is not true since these things have been observed even in countries with so called vibrant democracy. As is the case of US,

for instance. In fact, it can be seen that recently a reporter of *New York Times* Judith Miller has been jailed for refusing to divulge her source to the prosecutor investigating the Bush Administration's leak of a CIA officer's identity to the newspaper. The foreign media enterprises which bought large number of media enterprises in both countries started hobnobbing with ruling elites who favoured their business interests.

The privatization has certainly led to the development of diversity in the field of media, as people could choose from variety of media options but privatization has turned people into consumers who are demanding entertainment, gossip, sex, scandal rather than serious and intellectual debate. So, in both Hungary and Romania serious publications have been thrown out from the market and the market of glossy magazines is booming.

Thus, it can be argued that the introduction of liberal democracy and market economy could not be taken as a panacea to free the media. Though, one could feel to be living in a freer media environment but actually one is not free as one's tastes, modes of thought, values are all manufactured by market players. The same has happened in both Hungary and Romania.

Therefore, a mechanism should be developed in both the countries to free the media from state as well as business interests. Regulatory bodies should be given full autonomy. People with impartial images should be appointed in these bodies. Most important of all public should be made conscious and aware so that they could check the government interference into the independent working of media. Media should also be saved from the monopolies. Although, it is difficult to continue the public interest with the competitive market element in the context of media programmes even in well-

established democracies, it is nevertheless crucial to aim towards this goal if one wants to strengthen democracy.

In both Hungary and Romania, under the pressure of international institutions, NGOs and civil society, media environment is moving in a satisfactory direction. Hungary is doing relatively better than Romania in terms of media freedom. As, in the previous chapters, it has been discussed at length that Freedom House has placed Hungary above Romania in terms of media freedom. But, it could be hoped that in coming future, both the countries would do better in terms of freeing media from government as well as commercial interests as growing consciousness among people and international institutions are pressurizing the governments to do so.

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